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ABSTRACT

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***SOCIAL INNOVATION AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM
WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES***

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The fundamental role of public administration, as an activity of organization, coordination and provision of public services, and its contribution to the well-being and stability of the entire society have become axioms of contemporary governance. Against the backdrop of global trends or mega-trends, such as economic instability, digitalisation or climate change, and to respond to the growing difficulty of the problems they face, governments are building new reform strategies, integrating innovation as a tool that can ensure the deep and sustainable transformation of the public service.

Public service reform, social innovation, but also the transformation of the public administration in order to improve its own performance and relations with citizens are themes of great complexity, which have been and are explored by researchers and professionals interested in the specific characteristics and dynamics of administrative phenomena. The analysis of these phenomena has been considerably enriched in recent decades by developing new concepts, theories and research methods, but also by multiplying the applied perspectives, which have led to the elaboration of a vast scientific literature on these topics.

The present work has as fundamental objectives the in-depth study of social innovation and its interaction with the process of public services reform at the level of local communities in European states, in the current socio-economic context, and the conception of a complex model of analysis that can be used to apply social innovation in the field of public service. The other specific objectives, pursued in this approach, relate to the analysis of social innovation systems (in the form of a comparative study) and to the classification of forms of social innovation applied in the public sector, to the process of reform in the public service at European level and in the Member States, and to the analysis of several types of important effects of social innovation, when it is applied in the framework of the public service reform at the level of local authorities, the level closest to the citizens.

The research undertaken on the basis of the evaluation of the specialized literature in the field led to the identification of a rather less explored direction of analysis, namely the study of the interaction of social innovation and public service reform, at the level of local communities. The literature is rich and complex in the two areas, social innovation and public service, especially separately, but there are far fewer studies, which are devoted to the interaction between the process of social innovation and that of the reform of public services at local level, as well as to the analysis of the complementarity of the two concepts.

The paper aims to contribute thus to research in the field of social innovation from the perspective of analysing the role that innovation can have in the reform process so necessary to transform the ways in which the relations between the public administration and the citizens take place, on the complex terrain of the public service. In this respect, the paper aims to identify the ways in which various forms of social innovation applied within the public service reform, from those of a normative and conceptual nature to those based on new technologies, can contribute to improving the quality of the public services offered, and implicitly respond to the needs of social inclusion. Research into these fundamental issues is based on the premise that there is a close link between the reform process and innovation in the public service, which is why it is not possible to assess the interaction of social innovation and public service reform without an in-depth analysis of all the aspects mentioned.

The thesis is structured on five chapters, Conclusions and Bibliography, each chapter presenting the analysis of a specific topic meant to lead to the achievement of the scientific objectives.

In **CHAPTER I, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**, the theoretical framework of the thesis is elaborated, by presenting the specific theories used and the research methodology, and the scientific objectives are formulated. The scientific framework is based on concepts and tools offered by the theories on public administration and new public management, theories in the field of social innovation, but also on studies in the field of quantitative evaluation based on indicators and the analysis of types of impact (social, economic, on the environment) of innovation in the public service. As regards research methods, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used. For instance, the method of systematic analysis was applied to evaluate and explore a vast scientific literature, together with the comparative approach. The quantitative methods are also required, because a series of data are necessary to understand the evolution of innovation and the progress of reform in the public sector, and, in particular, in the public service. The theorists who have explored research methods in the field have stressed the importance of applying several research paradigms, which implicitly involve the use of *multiple perspectives*¹. Specialists in administrative sciences have called this type of approach „*methodological pluralism*”², „multiple methods”, „combined methods” or „*mixed methods research*”³.

In addition, there is an expansion of the managerial perspective on the public administration and the public service, which brings to the fore the need to reorganize the processes and internal

¹ Kaifeng Yang & Gerald J. Miller (eds.), *Handbook of Research in Public Administration*, Boca Raton: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008.

² Sabine Kuhlmann and Hellmut Wollmann, *Introduction to Comparative Public Administration: Administrative Systems and Reforms in Europe*, Second Edition, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2019, p. 2.

³ Rob Timans, Paul Wouters, Johan Heilbron, „Mixed Method Research: What It Is and What It Could Be”, in: *Theory and Society*, 48, pp. 193-216, 2019, p. 193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-019-09345-5>.

relations within the structures of the public administration. In this context, it should be noted that scientific research into social innovation in the public sector highlights the importance of establishing a system for measuring innovation on the basis of rigorous methods of assessing the effects, both quantitative and qualitative, of innovation in the public sector, given that in this area, the literature is not yet sufficiently developed. In order to achieve the objectives of the paper, an extensive evaluation was first made on the literature in the field of social innovation, and then on the literature in the field of public service in order to create a conceptual framework necessary to go through the other stages of the study. The qualitative evaluation was achieved through systematic review, based on "multiple roots" (multiple concepts and sources), in order to deepen the study of the literature.

By going through as many relevant studies as possible and applying systematic analysis, this paper contributes to the synthesis and presentation in a coherent and unitary form of the results obtained by the existing literature on social innovation in the public sector. We can say that this type of analysis based on the rigorous exploration of sources allows highlighting some defining features of the phenomena studied based on the conclusions of these researches, but also the identification of those aspects or research directions that are not sufficiently studied. The paper also aims to present in a clear manner the defining features of social innovation in the public sector, but also to bring to the fore a number of its less analysed characteristics.

Another useful method on which this study was based is the comparative method that leads to the establishment of similarities and differences between the analysed processes, but also to their much deeper understanding. The importance of this method has been recognized by various researchers who considered it to be essential for both the theory and practice of public administration⁴. The American researcher Fred Riggs, 1991, considered that any scientific framework for researching the phenomenon of public administration must be comparative. He stated that: „In a globalized system, frameworks and theories must be developed for the study of public administration that are universal as a sphere of application”, a fact that can be achieved by using the comparative approach in the study of different states of the world. At the same time, researchers in the field of social sciences consider that the comparative method is the "methodological core" of the humanities⁵. It is worth noting that in recent years, the comparative method has acquired a well-deserved place in the methods of researching the phenomena and processes of public administration. It is estimated that it has become much more „important" and „competitive" and that it has made „considerable progress" by increasing its complexity both from an analytical point of view and in terms of its content. The

⁴ Eric E. Otenyo, Nancy Lind (eds.), *Comparative Public Administration: The Essential Readings*, Oxford: JAI Press Elsevier, 2006, p. xxi.

⁵ Gabriel Almond, Bingham Powell, Russel Dalton, Kaare Strom, *Comparative Politics Today: A World View*, 9th Edition, Harlow: Longman, 2007, p. 33.

comparison of the concept of public service in the Romanian and European law, of the administrative organization and of the reform models within the European states and at the level of the European Union, as well as of the methods of social innovation applied by various European public administrations, contributed to the establishment of some defining features, of some trajectories of the administrative reforms, but also of some possible "lessons" to be learned that can help to design more rigorously the future strategies of reform of public administration in the field of increasing the quality of public service by applying social innovation.

Therefore, a series of significant theories have been used for the study of the proposed theme, along with qualitative and quantitative methods, starting from the idea of their complementarity, without claiming the superiority or exclusive character of one or another of these categories applicable to the study of administrative phenomena.

Chapter II, entitled *SOCIAL INNOVATION – SOCIAL INNOVATION SYSTEMS AND MODELS*, focuses on defining „social innovation” (as a fast-growing concept) and analysing and establishing a classification of the various forms and methods of social innovation.

We mention that in this paper, social innovation is understood in the sense of social actions taken in order to find new / original solutions to unresolved social problems, a meaning that many authors have emphasized (Drewe, Klein and Hulsbergen, 2008⁶, Martinelli, 2012⁷, Michelini, 2012⁸, Anderson, Curtis and Wittig, 2014⁹, Saiz-Álvarez (ed.) 2016¹⁰).

From the multitude of meanings attributed to the concept of innovation, several definitions have been selected, due to their being distinguished by clarity and rigor in establishing the specific features of social innovation, a term that has recently become „fashionable”, but has not always been used accurately. The choice of these definitions was made, at the same time, in accordance with the objectives of the paper, constituting fundamental theoretical landmarks for this analytical approach.

The definition of the term social innovation and its expansion have received increasing attention, and as a result of the transition from an industrial society to a society based on knowledge and services, a new paradigm of innovation has emerged, with the essential feature of opening up the

⁶ Paul Drewe, Juan-Luis Klein, Edward Hulsbergen, (eds.), *The Challenge of Social Innovation in Urban Revitalization*, Amsterdam: Techne Press, 2008.

⁷ Flavia Martinelli, „Social Innovation or Social Exclusion? Innovating Social Services in the Context of a Retrenching Welfare State”, în: Hans-Werner Franz, Joseph Hochgerner, Jürgen Howaldt (eds.), *Challenge Social Innovation*, Berlin, Springer, 2012, pp. 169-180, DOI https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-32879-4_11.

⁸ Laura Michelini, *Social Innovation and New Business Models: Creating Shared Value in Low-Income Markets*, Heidelberg, Springer, 2012.

⁹ Tara Anderson, Andrew Curtis, Claudia Wittig, *Definition and Theory of Social Innovation*, MA Thesis, Krems, Danube University, www.social-innovation-blog.com/.../2014/, 2014.

¹⁰ Jose Manuel Saiz-Álvarez (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Social Entrepreneurship and Solidarity Economics*, Hershey PA: Business Science Reference, 2016.

process of innovation to society¹¹. This new paradigm is based on the inclusion of social innovation in strategies to solve the most complex and pressing problems facing contemporary society. Together with various companies, universities and research institutes, citizens and clients need to become relevant actors in the process of social innovation. If the activity and functioning of public sector institutions are transformed in such a way as to stimulate social innovation, then these transformations can be beneficial for users, citizens, public sector employees, private partners and beneficiaries, and for society as a whole.¹² The focus is placed on the importance of social innovation, which has evolved rapidly in recent years and has been successfully implemented by many public administrations in Europe. Social innovation is a system that can create new ways for social actors to actively participate in solving community problems, their actions leading to the creation and establishment of new social relationships (social networks) between individuals and groups, once isolated.¹³

Our research aims to use the results obtained by social authors in the field of social innovation, to demonstrate its complex interaction with public sector reform and to deepen a new direction in the literature exploring various methods of social innovation "invented" and applied especially by local communities, following the way they are developed to ensure that social needs are met. Another specific objective of this chapter, namely the establishment of a typology of innovation, was achieved on the basis of the classification elaborated by the *Oslo Manual* (2005, 3rd edition). It defines the following categories: product innovation, process innovation, marketing innovation, organizational innovation. The latest edition of the *Oslo Manual* (2018) presents a more comprehensive definition of innovation to include public innovation, a term used to refer to public sector innovation.

The new challenges facing public administrations globally in the 21st century have led to a number of changes in the field of scientific theories on innovation, with a growing interest in researchers in the social dimensions of innovation. . In this sense, in the literature there is a change in the way of approaching innovation, highlighting the deep social character of innovation. This new trend has become increasingly clear and supports the idea that all innovation processes have, in fact, a social character, because innovation has primarily a social objective, whether it is product innovation, process or marketing. Some researchers, such as Howaldt, Kopp, and Schwarz, argue for a sociological theory of innovation, claiming that society as a whole is becoming a space for

¹¹ Vienna Declaration, The most relevant topics in social innovation research, published Nov.10, 2011, p. 1, https://wbc-rti.info/object/document/7133/attach/Vienna-Declaration_final_10Nov20111.pdf.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹³ Geoff Mulgan, *Social Innovation: what is it, why it matters, how it can be accelerated*, Oxford, Skoll Center for Social Entrepreneurship and the Young Foundation, 2006.

innovation¹⁴. In this context of society's openness to innovation, more and more forms or types of innovation are appearing, among which managerial innovation and innovation in the field of public policy occupy an increasingly important place. At the same time, the scientific literature states that at least three new paradigms of innovation have developed, namely: „user-driven innovation”, „open innovation” and „co-created” or „co-created value” with users and customers¹⁵.

In order to establish the characteristics and dimensions of social innovation, it is necessary to establish a typology of social innovation. One of the first authors to classify innovation by establishing some specific categories is Harvey Brooks. According to Brooks, there are the following types: social innovation, socio-technological innovation and technological innovation¹⁶. In its turn, social innovation is classified into: managerial, organizational, political, institutional innovation. Recent studies show that alongside well-established categories of innovation, such as product innovation, process innovation, service innovation, a separate category is public sector innovation or public innovation. The development of research in the field of public innovation was also influenced by the current reform in the field of public governance, known as the „new public management” (NPM). Although the impact of this current on governments, governance and public sector reform has varied widely across the various European countries, its undeniable merit is its far-reaching formulation and imposition of the principles that underpin the ability of the public sector to develop and reinvent itself, to „renew” itself constantly. This new discourse on the ability of public managers to implement reforms and innovations deeply transformative has led to a reshaping of the administrative agenda and the creation of favourable conditions for public sector reform with a view to improving public policies and services.

One of the authors who developed a classification of public innovation is Windrum¹⁷ in 2008 (also taken up in the European Commission's 2013 EPSIS pilot study proposing the first scoreboard for measuring public sector innovation). The author sets out the following categories of public innovation: service innovation, service delivery innovation, administrative and organizational innovation, conceptual innovation, (public) policy innovation, and systemic innovation. Research on public sector innovation has highlighted its collaborative dimension, creating a new phrase, namely: collaborative innovation (also taken up in the European Commission's 2013 EPSIS pilot study proposing the first scoreboard for measuring public sector innovation).

¹⁴ Jürgen Howaldt, Ralf Kopp, Michael Schwarz, *On the theory of social innovations: Tarde's neglected contribution to the development of a sociological innovation theory*, Weinheim, Beltz Juventa, 2015, <https://d-nb.info/1191527654/34>.

¹⁵ Stoyan Tanev, Mette Præst Knudsen, Tanja Bisgaard, Merethe Stjerne Thomsen, *op.cit.*

¹⁶ Harvey Brooks, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁷ Paul Windrum, „Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Public Services”, pp. 3-10, in: Paul Windrum, Koch, P. (eds.), *Innovation in Public Sector Services. Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Management*. Cheltenham, UK, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2008, p. 8.

A classification of public innovation can also be found in one of the most recent studies that summarizes the research and methodology used in the field of innovation. According to this study, innovation in the public sector (or „public innovation”), which offers a wide field of exploration, can be classified into several categories such as: digital social innovation, corporate social innovation, public social innovation and community-led social innovation.

A model of public sector innovation is proposed by the *Observatory of Public Sector Innovation / OPSI*, according to which public sector innovation can be: innovation focused on improving existing processes / services, mission oriented innovation, adaptive innovation and anticipatory innovation¹⁸.

It can be noted that one of the categories of innovation that is gaining more and more attention in the recent literature is service innovation.

The increasingly important role of services is determined by the socio-economic changes that have taken place in almost every state in the world where there is a shift from industrial to service society or service economy. The society of European states is still characterized by a dynamic labour market, new employment structures, changing family structures, but also by a negative demographic trend, that of increasing the share of the aging population in the structure of the global population. All these factors drive a growing demand for new social services. The biggest pressure is on health and care for the elderly.¹⁹

Against the background of these pressures on public services, caused by the complex needs and growing expectations of citizens, but also by the proliferation of problems difficult to solve by applying standard solutions, there is an increase in the requirements for innovation in the public sector. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in public sector innovation, so many governments have launched or intend to launch national programs to stimulate innovation in public services and public sector regulations. International organizations, such as the UN and the OECD, also stressed the need to accelerate public sector innovation processes and recommended the development of national strategies to increase it. Unfortunately, social innovation programs in the field of public administration and management are not sufficiently institutionalized, nor is the scientific debate in the field.

Regarding the methods of social innovation, there are a multitude of practices focused on increasing the participation of citizens in deliberative processes, but also on the creation and provision

¹⁸ OPSI/OECD, *Measuring Public Sector Innovation. Why, when, how, for whom and where to?*, ALPHA Version: for discussion and comment, 2018, p. 32-34.

¹⁹ Thomas Sirovatka, Bent Greve, „Social Services and the Public Sector”, in: Thomas Sirovatka, Bent Greve (eds.), *Innovation in Social Services*, London, Routledge, 2016, p. 12.

of public services. The Quebec model and the model known as the "Kafka Brigade" were presented as models of innovation, selected to illustrate the role played by partnerships or collaboration between various actors, as well as the importance of social cohesion in local communities or social organizations. Partnerships and strong social cohesion have made it possible to find innovative solutions to various social problems.

The last part of Chapter II presents the European Union's contribution to social innovation research, highlighting the crucial role that the European Union institutions have played and continue to play in defining and shaping strategies that focus on social innovation. At European level, social innovation has been implicitly seen as an instrument of economic progress, becoming a key concept used as such in documents, acts of the European institutions and statements of prominent political figures of the Union, especially after the Lisbon Strategy of March 2000. The most significant document in the evolution of social innovation as Union policy it is represented by the Europe 2020 Strategy which proposes a ten-year development plan (2010-2020) aimed at continuing the reforms initiated in Lisbon. The Europe 2020 Strategy recognizes and fully recognizes the role of social innovation in achieving the goals and aspirations of growth and the quality of life of EU citizens.

Chapter III, *PUBLIC SERVICE - EVOLUTION AND ORGANIZATION IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE* explores the topic of public service, according to the regulations of European law and Romanian law, the main objective being to present a series of aspects regarding the organization, functioning and typology and regime applicable to the public service. Thus, the theoretical framework necessary for the more in-depth analysis of the public service reform issue (made in the next chapter) is presented, presenting the fundamental notions used in the field of public service, both in Romanian and comparative law, but also some specific trends in public service evolution at European level.

The notion of public service through its content, but also through the ways of organization, is a fundamental concept for the activity of public administration, experiencing a gradual development that reached its peak in the middle of the twentieth century²⁰. The public service as a public administration activity is organized with a precise purpose, the satisfaction of a general interest. The organization and management of public services, as well as their typology, differ from one state to another, therefore it is necessary to use conceptual clarifications and delimitations that reflect their variety and complexity.

In this respect, one can remark that concepts such as public service, economic public service, public utility service are used, and more recently, in the conception of the European Union, which favours the notions of „service of general economic interest” or „service of general interest”. This

²⁰ Emil Bălan, *Instituții administrative*, București, Ed. C. H. Beck, 2008., p.127.

notion corresponds to the concept of „service public” under French law. In Community law, we also note the existence of the concept of „universal service” which is the subject of several acts of the Community institutions, in particular in the field of the reform of the so-called „network services” (such as postal or telecommunications services, including electronic ones).

From the analysis of the specialized literature, it may be stated that there is a great variety of regimes of the public service in the European states, both in terms of the field of activity and in terms of their organization and their functioning regime. This leads to a multiplication of classification criteria and directions for the evolution and transformation of the public service, which remain dependent on the social, political and economic contexts of European states. Variety in this area, as well as the extremely important role of state, regional and local authorities, has been expressly accepted by the EU by the Treaty of Lisbon.

In Romanian law, three stages can be established in the foundation of a public service theory: the end of the twentieth century, in which the „classical definition” is formulated, belonging to the French specialists in public law (taken over in most European states); the interwar period (marked by numerous debates between the Romanian specialists) and the current period (characterized by new trends and assimilating a plurality of economic, social, managerial perspectives of users in defining the public service). The current stage is influenced by the „public service crisis” and the phenomena taking place within the European Union ²¹.

The organization and operation of public services are regulated in detail in Part VIII, Titles I-IV of the current Administrative Code, which indicates both the categories and the competent authorities to organize and coordinate their activity. The definition of public service is presented in art. 5 of the Administrative Code, according to which the public service means „the activity or set of activities organized by a public administration authority or by a public institution or authorized or authorized or delegated by it, in order to satisfy a general need or of public interest, on a regular and continuous basis”. Thus, the decentralized public services at the level of the local public administration are organized and operate under the coordination of the deliberative authorities of the local communities, namely the county and local councils.

Concerning the trends in the evolution of public service in Europe, the last part of this chapter dedicated to public service identifies a number of important phenomena, such as the outsourcing of public service to a municipal or inter-municipal company or to a private company. The main method used is known as „agencification”, with its form „corporatization”, but other terms are also used to refer to the hybrid solutions used to provide public services. Another trend in the field of public service provision is „remunicipalisation”, which means a „return” of public services under the

²¹ Dragoş Valentin Dincă, *Sistemul administrativ românesc – inspirație franceză și adaptare autohtonă*, Bucureşti, Ed. Economică, 2012, p. 118.

coordination of municipal authorities. This phenomenon was determined by a number of factors such as: the fading trust in the superiority of the private sector and neo-liberal policies, an increasing interest and the political will of municipal authorities to provide public services and to use the revenues obtained from the provision of these services, a change in socio-political values that favour a the role of the public sector (especially local government authorities) in providing public services and the pressure of local communities through local referendums. Although it cannot be considered a universal phenomenon, remunicipalisation is an important development taking place at international level. This trend may be used also as an additional argument to sustain the idea of the growing role of social actors, along with municipal or local authorities, who decide to take action in order to address complex social needs.

CHAPTER IV - PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM: CURRENT CONTEXT AND TRENDS IN PUBLIC SERVICE DEVELOPMENT provides an in depth study of the public service reform and the determinants of the reform, both at European level and in Romania.

Public administration and public sector organizations around the world have undergone a major process of transformation in recent decades, with efforts to find and implement strategies to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public activity and services. Specialists who have been concerned with analysing the evolution of public administration in recent years have systematized the factors that have the greatest impact on it, grouping them into various categories. The category of changes or factors specific to the socio-economic and ecological context / environment includes, first and foremost, the financial crisis and demographic change, as well as climate phenomena and the pandemic that began in 2019, as the main challenges facing governments in globally in the last five years.

At present, most European public administrations have engaged in a process of reorganizing the public sector, with experts showing that the reform measures implemented by governments have been aimed primarily at streamlining spending and implementing measures to increase the efficiency of public services. . These restructuring measures took various forms and covered multiple aspects of public administration, such as public administration structures, the number of employees in the administration, human resources policies, working conditions. The most well-known and studied reform models in the thesis are: New Public Management (NPM), New Public Governance and „New Public Service (NPS)”.

The traditional or classical Weberian system has long been the most popular form of public management. Since the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s, the Weberian system of organization has undergone a number of changes due to the application of the „new public management” model, under the influence of existing management and administration practices in the private sector. The 2000s bring other notable transformations, in the form of new trends in the organization of public

administration activity, and thus other models are increasingly mentioned. Each of them has its specific defining features, as well as its own ways of approaching public sector reform, due to a specific philosophy and ideology on which is based.

Unlike the traditional model of organizing public administration, the reform model known as the „new public management” (NPM) is based on the theory of „public choice” and has become increasingly known as a result of the failure of the first wave of public service reforms, which took place in the 1980s. This model represents also a reaction to the inability of the traditional public administration to adapt to the requirements of a competitive market economy. For this reason, it was considered that taking over the principles of private sector management and that of ensuring competitiveness is a beneficial solution for public sector management. The fundamental elements of the NPM model are: taking over specific management solutions from private organizations, focusing on entrepreneurship in public sector organizations, considering the costs of managing public services, increasing the importance of market use, competition and contracts in the field of public service provision.

The effectiveness of the NPM in public administration reform has been seriously questioned, which is why, in the first decade of the 21st century, new models have been elaborated to ensure a solution to the challenging issues facing public administration. As a result of the practical and conceptual difficulties encountered by both models of public administration, a large number of specialists in the field have been interested in developing new theories and perspectives for addressing public sector reform. Although these new theories do not form a unitary paradigm, certain common features can be identified, a fact that ensures a degree of consistency. The terminology proposed for this new set of theories is diverse, the most commonly used being phrases such as: „new public service”, „new public governance” or „post-New Public Management (post-NPM)”.

From the comparative analysis of the characteristic features of these models, we can identify the differences between them, which are also the elements of novelty developed and introduced by each of them. The conclusion reached by several researchers is that the success of modernizing the public services sector will be ensured by adapting the models to the existent context of public administration. It will often be necessary to apply several specific principles and rules of two or all three models at the same time, thus creating mixed, or hybrid models that involve the parallel coexistence of the Weberian model, for example, with that of the „NPS”. The option for hybrid solutions seems to be the only viable one in the current context marked by high-risk phenomena for the public administration of the 21st century. The scientific research emphasizes the paramount importance of including the public interest and the needs of citizens as key landmarks of public management, which is meant to truly ensure the modernization of the public services sector.

Public service reform in Europe has been carried out through a series of successive regulations and actions by the EU institutions, including the European Commission's initiative to liberalize the market for services and replace the existing monopoly in these areas of public interest, such as electronic communications, postal services, or other services such as gas and electricity (known as „network services”). The stated aim was to increase the efficiency of these core services and to standardize the existing regulatory framework by creating a set of principles and standards to be followed by all Member States.

EU public service policy is mainly dominated by the European Commission, which has the right of legislative initiative. The whole of the public service reform work is marked by a series of important Commission communications, which have led to a change in the regulatory framework for public services and their evolution to the present stage, in which new organizational arrangements have been created and provision of services that ensure the satisfaction of the basic needs of citizens. The Commission's initiatives to create and accomplish the single market for key services, such as electronic communications and postal services, represent a first step in a much broader reform process that has sought to bring public services to the current stage, which is based on greater innovation in the organization and delivery of public services that gradually become „digital” or „smart”. The process of reforming this key service sector has also meant the gradual introduction of a European dimension in the regulation and provision of services, by recognizing and consolidating issues that go beyond the national borders of the Member States.

In the context of the reform of public services promoted at EU level, through the Commission in particular, we need to note, at conceptual level, the importance of establishing the „universal service” provisions. We can state that it has summed up a whole vision of the European public service mission, which is to ensure that citizens have access to basic services of a certain quality, at an affordable price, no matter where they are. At the same time, it can be said that significant progress has been made at this stage in moving to the next phase of the reform, which requires radical changes. We consider that the Directive establishing the *Electronic Communications Code* of 2018 was an important link in the evolution from a modern to a cutting-edge vision of public services, as an integral part of the EU's ambitious goals, such as the digital single market and the „Digital Decade”.

The reform of postal services, as well as of telecommunications services, and the creation of legislation to provide the necessary legal framework for its implementation, marks the beginning of a much more extensive process of public service reform at European level, under the overwhelming influence of the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies. This phenomenon and the urgent need to increase the quality and adaptability of public services are two of the reasons why the EU has made efforts to readjust its regulatory framework to ensure the transition from the existing public service to the digital public service. This stage of the European public service reform

is based on an important dimension of innovation in public services represented by the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), which ensures the transformation of traditional governance into „e-government”. Since public services cover a wide range of relationships between citizens and the business environment, on the one hand, and between these beneficiaries (stakeholders) and their governments, on the other hand, the service interface must meet the requirements of good governance and high standards of quality and efficiency, at all levels of public administration (national, regional, local). Therefore, the association between innovation in public services through the use of new technologies and the reform process can be noted again, with innovation becoming a key concern for the EU as well as for each of the European countries (and, in fact, for governments worldwide).

The fundamental principles and directions of the reform for the completion of the digital single market have been outlined in the Digital Single Market Strategy included in the Communication of the Commission of 6 May 2015²².

The regulatory framework for European public service reform has made further progress with the recent set of documents and policies launched by the EU to accelerate the digitization of public services, a pressing need demonstrated by the context of the (still ongoing) pandemic which has affected the way citizens interact with all structures of public administration, globally. The European Union has established itself as a key direction for action „Shaping Europe's digital future”²³. To achieve this fundamental goal, it has designed a cutting-edge vision for the „Digital Decade of Europe” by 2030.

Under the influence of EU regulations and policies that aim to create the Digital Single Market, European countries have also begun the process of transition to the digitalisation of public services. Public service reform through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), both basic, older and newer, in public administration processes and activities, has created a huge potential for better organization and delivery of faster and cheaper public services. To increase the quality and speed of response in the provision of public services, European countries have taken over the EU-promoted principles for the transition to digitalisation: openness, interoperability, „once only” data collection, but also an increased social inclusion (inclusiveness) and public service accessibility.

More and more, governments (in all parts of the world) continue to strive to bring public services as close as possible to citizens and the business community.

²²Comunicarea Comisiei către Parlamentul European, Consiliu și Comitetul Economic și Social European și Comitetul Regiunilor, O strategie privind piața unică digitală pentru Europa, Com(2015) 192 final, Bruxelles, 6.5.2015

²³ Strategia din 19 februarie 2020.

Regarding the public service reform in Romania, the fundamental premise is that the reform process is a long one and involves various dimensions and stages, each with its own importance and features. The contribution of each stage of public administration reform in Romania has created the current „look”/image it has today. The theme of this chapter is the analysis of the ways in which social innovation solutions have been applied to the public service reform in Romania, therefore the most significant stages of public administration reform have been briefly presented. The detailed analysis focuses on reform strategies and measures aimed at transforming the public service. Making efforts to align with the trends at EU level, Romania has been involved in a process of DE bureaucratization, by establishing strategies to reduce the „administrative burden” and simplify administrative procedures for citizens and business. These strategies were based primarily on the analysis of existing legislation and the performance of measures to establish the „cost of administrative burden”²⁴.

Between 2001 and 2013, a number of measures were initiated to simplify administrative procedures for citizens. One of these measures is the organization of the one-stop shop for the issuance of essential documents, such as registration certificates, identity cards, voter cards, driving licenses and passports. In order to support the business environment, measures have been put in place to simplify the method of payment of taxes and duties.

Starting with 2014, the *Public Administration Consolidation Strategy 2014-2020* was elaborated, and was approved by H.G. no. 909/2014²⁵. In order to reduce bureaucratic obstacles, by simplifying administrative procedures with the greatest negative effects on citizens (such as increased costs, excessive information time or slow response of the administration, etc.), the *Strategy* proposes a fourfold approach. The integrated plan for simplifying administrative procedures for citizens has been developed in conjunction with the *Better Regulation Strategy 2014-2020*²⁶ and the *National Strategy on the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020*²⁷. At the same time, the integrated plan was based on the conclusions of a detailed analysis of the needs and objectives of simplifying and streamlining administrative procedures for citizens.

The reform process in Romania has been supported by EU that has encouraged our country and all Member States to implement the necessary measures to improve their public administration, through the large-scale program designed by the Structural Reform Support Service (initiated by the European Commission in 2015). This Service has supported 26 Member States in their reform process and has set up over 760 support programs. A complex mechanism provides for a number of

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ H.G. nr. 909/2014, publicată în M. Of. al României, Partea I, nr. 834bis/17.XI.2014.

²⁶ Hotărârea Guvernului nr. 1076/2014 pentru aprobarea *Strategiei privind mai buna reglementare 2014-2020*.

²⁷ Hotărârea Guvernului nr. 245/2015 pentru aprobarea *Strategiei naționale privind Agenda Digitală pentru România 2020*.

procedures for monitoring the reform within the European Semester (the process of coordinating EU economic policy). The Romanian Government has annually prepared a strategic document entitled the *National Reform Program* (of which the ones from 2019 and 2021 were analysed in detail). By harmonizing its own actions with the requirements and objectives set by the EU in the reform process aimed at digitizing public services, Romania has, in its turn, entered a new stage of the public service reform process.

The first broad action is to reform the current legislative framework by introducing new legislation, specific to the process in question, namely the transition to digitalisation of public administration. From the analysis of the new relevant legislation, it can be stated that both the horizontal legislation, which refers to large areas or themes of the digitization of public services, and the specific one, applicable to some specialized fields, have been improved. These normative acts contain the fundamental principles and directions of action in the field of digitalization of public services and transpose the norms of the community law into the positive Romanian law.

Of particular importance is the *National Strategy on the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020* (SNADR 2020), adopted by Government Decision no. 245/2015, as it aligns with the strategic objectives of the „Digital Agenda”, included in the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, in order to strengthen the digital single market within the EU. To ensure the implementation of SNADR 2020, a monitoring system has been provided in the „SNADR Monitoring and Evaluation Manual”, a document elaborated in 2016. The authority that created this manual is the Ministry of Communications and Information Society, the main institution to implement SNADR. Another essential document for the digitalization of public administration is the *National Interoperability Framework* (CNI), approved by Government Decision no. 908/2017, with subsequent amendments and completions. This framework aims primarily to achieve the objective of „promoting and supporting the provision of public services in Romania by developing inter-institutional, intersectoral and cross-border interoperability”²⁸. This normative act establishes a set of general principles to ensure the creation of the interoperability framework necessary for the digitization of public services in Romania. In order to accomplish and support the reform efforts in the domain of public services by accelerating the digitization process, the public policy in the field of e-government was developed and adopted²⁹. This policy establishes a framework of measures and actions to ensure the implementation of the digitalisation of public administration.

²⁸ Cadrul Național de Interoperabilitate, p. 3, <https://sgg.gov.ro/uploads/2017/12/Anexa-8>.

²⁹ *Politică publică în domeniul e-guvernării, 2021*, Direcția Coordonare Politici și Priorități, în cadrul Proiectului „Stabilirea cadrului de dezvoltare a instrumentelor de e-guvernare (EGOV)”, Iunie 2021, <http://e-consultare.gov.ro/w/propunere-de-politica-publica-in-domeniul-e-guvernarii-elaborata-in-cadrul-proiectului-stabilirea-cadrului-de-dezvoltare-a-instrumentelor-de-e-guvernare-cod-sipoca-20/>.

Romania is currently engaged in the public service reform process, but it still has a series of significant steps to take in order to fulfil all these objectives assumed by the acts and strategies presented. According to EU monitoring, our country is in a modest position in its transition towards digital public services and implementation of e-government reform.

The complementarity between the concepts of reform and innovation is analysed in detail in the last subsection of Chapter IV. It is estimated that although public administration reform does not constitute innovation in itself, so the two concepts are not identical, complex relationships develop between public sector reform and social innovation, as the crisis of contemporary administration increasingly requires solutions that have never been applied before. Furthermore, in the context of increasing financial constraints and citizens' requirements, traditional solutions are no longer effective. These evolutions force governments to look for the new, for innovation, in forms that we have never seen before.

The selection and presentation of several scientific arguments completes the analysis of the interdependence between public service reform and innovation. In fact, we can see that there are various ways to describe the complex relationships between innovation and reform processes. Another argument, in support of the idea of complementarity of innovation and reform, is the observation that the reform (of the last ten years) in the public service has relied heavily on innovative ideas or concepts introduced in new regulations. These innovative ideas have led to the reorganization of the public service and to the transformation of the types of relations or managerial styles within the various structures of the public administration involved in the provision of the public service.

Chapter V, *A COMPLEX MODEL OF ANALYSIS OF THE INTERACTION OF SOCIAL INNOVATION AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM*, uses and summarizes all our research findings to contribute to the understanding of the role of social innovation in public service reform. Its main objective was to develop an analysis model, structured on the basis of components considered fundamental to this process, namely: normative and conceptual innovation, organizational and technological innovation, through older but also emerging (or data-based) electronic technologies.

The other elements of the model are the instruments for measuring innovation in the public service (representing a novelty in themselves) and various quantitative data, which have made it possible to identify several categories of estimated impact of innovation in the public service. These components have been chosen for their crucial role in ensuring a profound transformation in the organization and delivery of public service through the application of several forms of innovation. Numerous studies on the evaluation and measurement of public innovation, carried out so far, have been investigated for the presentation of specific data and indicators. The ones that have been selected are the following: *Digital Economy and Society Index* (DESI), thematic subchapter „Digital public services”, *E-Government Benchmark* (conducted by Capgemini for the European Commission), the

study on e-government prepared by the UN and the OECD analysis of 2021, on the evolution and performance of governments in the member states of this organization (together with Brazil and Romania). Although the selected components were presented separately, respectively normative innovation, organizational innovation, technological innovation, we emphasize that, in practice, they manifested themselves in a complementary manner. This happens because, for instance, both conceptual and technological innovation generate organizational innovation, influencing the organization and internal processes within administrative structures that provide and manage the public service. The same observation is valid for the types of effects/impacts of innovation, because both economic and environmental impact are always closely related to social impact, influencing cognitive and relational patterns, quality of life (through the benefits it brings) and the degree of trust of the citizens in the public administration authorities. In order to suggest how the future of a smart local community may look like, the notion of innovation ecosystem was presented.

Innovation, as a process that aims to solve complex social problems, has gone through a series of stages, developing in a variety of forms that have gradually led to the creation of more complex models, known as innovation laboratories and innovation hubs. In close connection with these concepts, another one has been developed, namely the „innovation ecosystem”. This evolution of concepts responds, among other requirements, to the need to highlight the entities and processes on which innovation should focus, while also reflecting the changing mentality and perspective on innovation in many European public administrations, but also in other states belonging to the American continent or the Asian continent. These developments have led to the diffusion of the idea of „ecosystem” in almost every field of human society, which is why some professionals present today's world as a „new world of ecosystems”³⁰.

In previous chapters, it has been established that public service reform has been achieved through a number of innovative forms used by local government authorities, including „delegation of management” and „market”-use of public services, mainly through „agencification” or „corporatization”. The context was a difficult one as it was marked by both accentuated budgetary constraints, and by a series of detrimental limitations and pressures on the human resource in the public administration. This process of transformation still requires the firm implementation of reform measures with the intention to cause major changes in the organization and functioning of the public administration. That is why innovation has to be applied in public administration.

In order to highlight the close link between public service reform and innovation, expert groups, set up at the request of the OECD and at the initiative of the EU Commission, have created a scientific framework setting out the methods and actions needed to foster innovation and strengthen

³⁰ A New World of Ecosystems. <https://www.thenextevolution.com/2019/07/17/a-new-world-of-ecosystems/>. 2019.

the innovation capacity of the public administration. This framework is a very useful tool and has been therefore integrated as a component part of the analysis model developed in this chapter.

The usefulness of the analysis framework for the four key areas of action or „themes” is enhanced by its flexibility, as it gives the user the opportunity to complete it with other significant elements that may lead to a clarification of the directions of action to achieve reform and build the capacity for innovation in the public services sector. In addition, this framework was applied on the *Public Administration Consolidation Strategy 2014-2020*. Based on the close examination of this strategy, the measures corresponding to the four key areas of action, as well as the corresponding forms of innovation have been highlighted, in order to enhance the value of our model of analysis, which may support the public service reform process.

The identification of these areas of action and the components of social innovation in the field of public services, particularly in the *Strategy for Consolidating the Public Administration 2014-2020*, and other complementary documents, demonstrates the concern of public authorities for the inclusion of innovation in public strategies and policies in the reform process. The existence of this specific regulatory framework is a solid basis for further reform in the future.

From the final chapter of the conclusions, we highlight, in a succinct way, the contribution of the thesis to the improvement of scientific results for the fields explored, in particular of administrative sciences and social innovation, namely:

- ❖ the effort of synthesizing a vast literature, identifying the most relevant aspects and complementarities between the two research areas: public service reform and social innovation, as well as their presentation in a clearly and rigorously structured manner, including by exposing the elements, ideas, essential features, in the form of tables or figures;
- ❖ the creation of a scientific framework to sustain the interaction between social innovation and public service reform, based on a wide-ranging investigation of research in the two fundamental areas, and other related fields;
- ❖ the conceptual clarification achieved by selecting relevant definitions, both in the field of social innovation and public service, especially in situations where terminological proliferation does not allow a precise understanding of the notions;
- ❖ elaboration of our own definitions, both in the field of public service (definitions are proposed for „digital public service” and „European digital public service”) and of social innovation (establishing and explaining certain specific features of social innovation, explaining and defining forms of social innovation, for example „normative innovation” and the definition of „social innovation ecosystem”);
- ❖ clearly establishing certain categories of innovation specific to public administration and public service and identifying the application of these forms in various stages of the reform;

- ❖ highlighting the stages of public service reform and the regulatory framework created, both at European level and in various European countries, including Romania;
- ❖ the use of a comparative approach of the studied phenomena, of the reform models applied in several European states and of the specific tendencies of the evolution of the public service, up to the current stage characterized by the acceleration of the large-scale digitization process;
- ❖ analysis of quantitative methods and presentation of the current state of research in the field of measuring the performance and progress of public administration, based on specific indicators, on specialized fields (one of them being that of public services);
- ❖ elaboration of a scientific model for analysis and consolidation of the innovation capacity of the public administration that can be applied within the reform, a model that represents the synthesis of the directions and of the entire research effort for the elaboration of the thesis;
- ❖ presenting solutions to shape the image of the future of local communities that can be transformed into smart communities, based on the observation of applied methods and the extraordinary progress of several smart cities or innovative regions, and highlighting the role of innovation ecosystems involving close collaboration between all community actors: members of academia, citizens, decision makers / local authorities, various organizations, business representatives, etc.
- ❖ highlighting the possible directions to follow for the reform of the public service and the need to create models and scientific analysis frameworks that would be the basis of any strategic visions and measures applied in the reform process.

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