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SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS
THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR AND HIS ROLE IN ENSURING GOOD
ADMINISTRATION STANDARDS

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR

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1. Introductory considerations

Romanian society is in a broad process of transformation, imposed by the objective need for modernization, but also by Romania's status as a member of the European Union. Within this transformation of Romanian society, the importance of reforming and modernizing public administration, in accordance with European values, cannot be neglected.

The reform of public administration in Romania is a commitment assumed in all programmatic documents and a permanent concern of the Romanian Executive.

In order to support the modernization of public administration, it is necessary to implement a set of coherent measures in terms of human resources, aiming to create a stable and politically neutral executive structure.

The function of public administrator represents an essential element of local public administration, having as its main objective the professionalization and efficiency of the system of providing services to citizens, in countries with a modern and well-structured administration.

The public administrator should not be just a simple employee of a city hall, but should fulfill the role of promoter of change within the process of reforming the local public administration system.

The public administrator does not fulfill the role of manager in the bureaucratic sense of the word, but should be a well-trained professional capable of facilitating interactions and solving problems that arise within a community. He has the responsibility to continuously manage situations in order to satisfy the public interest of a particular community. At the level of local communities, the public administrator, the mayor and the local council create an adequate framework for identifying problems and proposing solutions to remedy them by developing and implementing local action plans.

The professionalization of the decision-making and executive system at the administration level is necessary in view of the multitude and complexity of the problems they face, especially in urban areas. In this context, the institution of the public administrator becomes an important component of modern public management, at the executive level. One way to make the activity of city halls more efficient in relation to citizens is to expand the model of delegation of some of the powers of mayors and presidents of county councils. This can contribute to strengthening efforts regarding administrative reform.

The presence of the public administrator is considered essential in modern public management, in a context where the political level is separated from the executive. Attracting professionals/specialists who combine technical, scientific and administrative knowledge with managerial skills and competences is one option in this regard.

The importance of research is to generate knowledge and to transmit, disseminate and capitalize on the knowledge obtained through research.

The doctoral thesis presents the methodology and results of case studies conducted to determine the role of the public administrator in various Administrative Territorial Units (ATUs) in Romania.

An essential element of originality and personal contribution in our research is the identification of theories and currents of thought regarding the city manager in the United States of America and Europe and the performance of comparative analyses in various administrative-territorial units. These are complemented by case studies conducted in seven distinct administrative entities, strategically selected to reflect a relevant diversity of local context.

Through this approach, our research provides not only a precise radiography of the realities of local governance, but also an analytical framework that can generate public policies that can be adapted, efficient and sustainable. Thus, the results obtained can constitute a valuable support for creating decision-making processes, increasing administrative transparency and strengthening institutional capacity at the local level.

The research adopts a mixed approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis, in an effort to obtain a comprehensive understanding to achieve the general and specific objectives.

The research is positioned in the public sector, in the field of public administration, at the intersection of the fields of evaluation and management, a niche related to the performance of the public administrator in local administration.

Based on the results obtained in the case studies, a series of recommendations with theoretical and practical value were formulated, focused on improving the role of the public administrator within the Territorial Administrative Units in Romania.

2. Research objectives and questions

The paper “The Public Administrator and His Role in Ensuring Good Administration Standards” started from the innovative nature of the function for the Romanian administrative system, innovative both from the perspective of the source of inspiration, namely the Anglo-Saxon administrative system, strongly differentiated from the French system on the basis of which the Romanian administration is organized.

To present the results obtained following the doctoral course, I opted to write the doctoral thesis according to the classical model, structuring the work in two parts, the first part having two chapters, the second part having three chapters, all well delimited. The structure of the thesis integrates two major components.

The first component is devoted to the examination and analysis of the relevant specialized literature in the field of public administration, with an emphasis on the perspectives and models applied in the United States of America, Europe and Romania. This part aims to highlight the conceptual developments, differences in approach and contemporary trends regarding the role and function of the public administrator.

The second component has an applied nature and involves both the performance of comparative analyses between different administrative-territorial units in Romania, as well as the application of quantitative and qualitative data analysis tools. The main objective is to evaluate the institutional performance and the role of the public administrator in the local context, providing an integrated and argued image of the efficiency of local governance. The results obtained contribute to the outline of practical recommendations for improving decision-making processes and strengthening administrative capacity.

In order to achieve the goal pursued by the development of the paper, a general objective of the research was established, namely: Establishing the role of the public administrator in ensuring good administration standards within the administrative-territorial units and several specific objectives.

Starting from the formulated general objective, the main question of the research arises: *"What is the role of the public administrator in ensuring and strengthening good administration standards within the administrative-territorial units in Romania?"*

This question investigates both the importance of the function and the practical contribution of the public administrator in the local governance process.

In order to achieve the established general objective, the research was oriented by defining a set of specific objectives, intended to detail the directions of exploration and analysis. In correlation with each specific objective, appropriate research questions were formulated, which had the role of guiding the investigative process and structuring the scientific approach. These questions contributed to clarifying the essential aspects regarding the role of the public administrator, identifying relevant variables and deepening the topic from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Thus, they functioned as anchor points in the complex analysis of local governance and good administration standards within the administrative-territorial units in Romania.

Thus, the secondary objectives of the research together with their related research questions were formulated to guide the analytical approach and support the achievement of the general purpose of the works.

Table 1. Specific Objectives and Research Questions

Specific Objective	Description	Research Question
Specific Objective 1	Theories and schools of thought regarding the city manager and public administration in the United States of America and Europe.	What are the main differences and convergences between the theories and models regarding the city manager function and public administration governance in the United States of America and Europe?
Specific Objective 2	Models of local governance and good governance standards in the United States of America and Europe.	How are the models of local governance in the United States of America and Europe reflected in the application of good governance standards, and what are the significant differences between them?
Specific Objective 3	The concept and role of the public administrator in Romania from the perspective of specialized doctrine.	How is the role of the public administrator in Romania defined and conceptualized in the specialized doctrine, and what are the main theoretical perspectives on these functions?
Specific Objective 4	A comparative analysis and a case study regarding the roles, responsibilities, and impact of the public administrator and the deputy mayor on the efficiency of local governance and the satisfaction of community needs within the administrative-territorial units in Romania.	To what extent, and through what differences or complementarities, do the functions of public administrator and deputy mayor contribute to the exercise of executive functions, the efficiency of local governance, and the satisfaction of community needs?
Specific Objective 5	Case studies regarding the contribution of the public administrator to the promotion and application of good administration standards in seven administrative-territorial units in Romania.	How does the public administrator contribute to the implementation of good administration standards within administrative-territorial units, and what are the factors that influence this contribution?

Source: Author's conception

The achievement of the general objective and the specific objectives assumed, by completing the two components of the research, led to the identification of the role of the public administrator in ensuring good administration standards within the Territorial Administrative Units, of the legislative deficiencies/gaps regarding his activity, as well as to proposals for improving the legislative framework so that, at the national level, public administrators have, mainly, the same objectives, responsibilities, rights, obligations, etc., these being able to be very little customized depending on the activity within the territorial administrative unit in which he carries out his activity.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Stages completed

To carry out the work, the research required three stages.

In the first stage, the documentation took place, which involved researching the specialized literature and analyzing theories regarding the public administrator, both at the national and international levels, as well as the relevant legislation in force.

The comparative analysis of the public administrator in America and Europe, two regions with distinct administrative traditions and different political systems, aims to highlight the similarities and differences between the two regions in terms of the role, structure and functioning of the public administrator.

For the analysis of the city manager model in the American space, the states of Ohio and Virginia were selected, since in these jurisdictions this administrative management system was implemented for the first time. The choice is not accidental, since studying these early examples allows a better understanding of the historical context, the initial motivations that were the basis for the introduction of the city manager position, as well as the way in which this model was consolidated and subsequently evolved. These states also offer a valuable perspective on the main objectives of the administrative reform of that period, namely increasing efficiency, professionalizing local administration management and reducing political influence on the decision-making process at the local level.

In the analytical approach undertaken regarding the city manager model in the European administrative space, the selection of Spain and Ireland was based on criteria of comparative relevance, systemic diversity and heuristic value for the research of contemporary local governance. The choice of the two jurisdictions reflects the interest in analyzing how the same managerial archetype is adapted and operationalized in profoundly different institutional contexts, thus highlighting the plasticity and versatility of the model.

Spain, with an administrative structure marked by asymmetric decentralization and consolidated regional autonomy, constitutes a suitable framework for examining how the city manager function coexists and interacts with multiple levels of public authority, in an administrative climate characterized by decisional pluralism and normative diversity. In this context, the professionalization of local administration through the introduction of the city manager becomes a tool for optimizing executive management, while maintaining democratic control exercised by elected authorities.

By contrast, Ireland offers a distinct paradigm, specific to unitary states with a centralizing tradition, in which the city manager function was introduced in response to the need for institutional modernization, rationalization of administrative processes and reduction of political influences on the daily management of local public affairs. In this sense, the Irish model reflects the orientation towards professionalized public management, based on the principles of efficiency, accountability and institutional transparency.

This methodological option allows not only a cross-sectional analysis of the implementation of the city manager model in contrasting administrative spaces, but also highlighting the limits and opportunities for institutional transfer in a European landscape in a continuous process of recalibrating the balance between politicization and professionalization in local public administration.

In the second stage, the research was deepened, the structure of the work was developed, the parts and chapters of the work were drafted. Also, the analysis of the legislation regarding the regulations regarding the role and duties of the public administrator was carried out, presenting an analysis and a comparison between the public administrator and the deputy mayor.

In the third stage, case studies were conducted on the role and importance of the public administrator vs. deputy mayor within the territorial administrative units and on the role of the public administrator in ensuring good governance standards within the territorial administrative units. The case studies were used as a research tool to analyze in depth concrete situations, carried out in a real context, thus providing a detailed and contextual understanding of the role of the public administrator.

3.2 Research methods used

The research methodology used aims to achieve the general objective and the specific ones by using qualitative and quantitative methods, according to scientific rigor.

Qualitative research represented a methodological framework used to obtain information about the activity of the public administrator, through non-standardized methods, such as open

interviews, observations and document analysis. Qualitative research allowed obtaining detailed information about the public administrator, through data collection methods that allow exploiting the subjectivity and complexity of the phenomenon. Qualitative research was characterized by the use of a flexible methodology, which allowed adapting the research plan to the evolution of the studied aspects.

Quantitative research represented a methodological framework used to obtain numerical information about the studied aspects and was based on the collection and analysis of numerical data, through statistical tools and mathematical techniques.

Also, the content method was used as a research method, applied in its two forms, classical and computer-assisted.

To achieve the general objective and specific objectives, various research methods and tools were used within the scientific work.

Table 2. Research Methods

Methodological Category	Instrument/Technique
Quantitative methods: Questionnaire-based survey	Questionnaires among public officials
Quantitative methods: Questionnaire-based survey	Questionnaires among public administrators
Qualitative methods: Interview	Interviews among mayors
Qualitative methods: Interview	Interviews among deputy mayors
Qualitative methods: Interview	Interviews among public administrators
Qualitative methods: Interview	Interviews among secretaries
Systematic Review	Used for a series of administrative documents

Source: Author's conception

3.3 Practical research

The practical research was carried out by carrying out two case studies, namely:

- i) a case study that established the role and importance of the Public Administrator vs. Deputy Mayor within the ATUs;
- ii) a case study conducted in seven ATUs that details and analyzes the way in which public administrators fulfill their role in ensuring the standards of good local administration.

In order to highlight the role and importance of the public administrator vs. deputy mayor within the Territorial Administrative Units, the practical research was carried out by carrying out a

case study, which analyzed and evaluated the organization and administration part within the Territorial Administrative Units in Romania.

To carry out the case studies, the questionnaire that was sent to the Territorial Administrative Units in the country was used as a quantitative method.

The questionnaire was designed based on the premise that the public administrator and the deputy mayor are two key actors within the Romanian ATUs, each with its own distinct role in ensuring the smooth functioning of the local administration and serving the interests of the community. The public administrator focuses on the efficient management of resources and policy implementation, while the deputy mayor supports the mayor in managing the ATU and can take over duties in his absence.

The case study can highlight how these two functions work together to achieve local objectives and ensure sustainable community development.

The questionnaire requested information from the Territorial Administrative Unit regarding:

- Presence of a public administrator within the UAT
- Presence of a deputy mayor within the UAT
- Reason for creating the position of public administrator at the UAT level
- Delegated duties of the public administrator
- Delegated duties of the deputy mayor
- Delegation of the position of chief credit officer to the public administrator or deputy mayor
- Experience in local public administration prior to the position held
- Method of appointing the public administrator

Responses to the questionnaire were received from 331 Territorial Administrative Units out of the 700 submitted.

The role of public administrators in the efficient management and development of public services is crucial in the context of the evolution of contemporary society, and thus case studies were conducted that carefully explored seven distinct mayoralties, analyzing in detail the duties of public administrators and their impact on the quality of public services provided to local communities.

In a constantly changing social and economic climate, public administration is becoming a determining factor for the success of a community. Through public administrators, who represent the backbone of this system, public policies are built and implemented to meet the diverse needs of citizens. Therefore, it is imperative to understand and evaluate their role in the functioning of a city hall.

In order to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the performance of the public administrator in local public administration, I opted for a detailed case study targeting seven administrative-territorial units located in different counties, namely the city of Strehaia in Mehedinți county, the city of Drăgănești – Olt in Olt county, which have approximately the same number of inhabitants, 10,000, the commune of Filipeștii de Pădure in Prahova county, the commune of Hilișeu – Horia in Botoșani county, the commune of Voitinel in Suceava county, the commune of Ostroveni in Dolj county and the commune of Văgiulești in Gorj county, thus covering distinct geographical regions of Romania, with varied economic, social and administrative particularities. In this sense, I tried to cover different regions of the country, thus ensuring national representativeness and a varied perspective on local public administration practices.

We selected the ATUs from different regions of Romania (North-East, Southeast, South-Muntenia, Southwest Oltenia, West, Northwest and Center) to capture regional diversity and to observe differences in the implementation and evaluation of public administrators' performance.

The selected ATUs have various organizational forms and administrative structures, which provides a broad perspective on how the public administrator contributes to good governance and the development of public services.

The selection of these administrative-territorial units aimed to ensure a relevant diversity in terms of community size, level of socio-economic development, local institutional structure and regional specificity, in order to capture as accurately as possible the multiple facets of exercising the function of public administrator in different administrative contexts. This approach allows the identification of common aspects, but also of contextual particularities that may influence the way in which the attributions are exercised, the degree of managerial involvement, the relationship with local political authorities and the impact on the organizational performance of the local public administration.

From this perspective, the research aims to generate relevant conclusions both for understanding the mechanisms of operation of the public administrator position in Romania, and for formulating recommendations for optimizing the normative and institutional framework that regulates this position in local administration.

To ensure a rigorous comparative analysis, we defined the following key indicators:

- Analysis of the justification for establishing the public administrator position
- Local administration performance management infrastructure
- Evaluation of the impact of the public administrator on the development of public services through qualitative and quantitative methods

➤ Evaluation of institutional collaboration with the public administrator: Perception of leadership and satisfaction of civil servants.

The methodology used allows not only to evaluate the performance of the public administrator in various ATUs in Romania, but also to identify good practices and challenges specific to each region. Thus, the research will contribute to a deep understanding of how the public administrator can positively influence local administration and will provide concrete recommendations for improving this essential function.

To identify these indicators, we started from the main research question:

"What is the role of the public administrator in ensuring and strengthening the standards of good administration within the administrative-territorial units in Romania?"

4. Thesis structure

The paper is structured in two parts, the first part having two chapters, the second having three chapters that highlight the complexity of the field, each having a defined purpose in the research process.

Part I of the thesis is dedicated to outlining the theoretical and methodological framework necessary for the analysis of the public administrator function, by reporting on international models of administration and the requirements of good governance. This section highlights conceptual fundamentals and relevant research directions, providing the indispensable scientific support for understanding the complexity and specificity of these functions in the context of contemporary public administration.

The first chapter *"General and methodological considerations regarding research"* presents the general aspects related to the public administrator, the importance of the research, the bibliometric study, the research objectives, as well as the research methodology. The research methodology specifies the stages followed, the research methods used and presents the way to carry out practical research.

Chapter two, *"Theories and Currents of Thought on Public Administration in the United States and Europe: Administration Models and Standards of Good Governance,"* presents theories and currents of thought on public administration in the United States and Europe, as well as local government models in Staunton (Virginia), Dayton, Ohio, Spain, and Ireland.

In the second part of the work, I conducted a series of analyses on the status, role and impact of the public administrator in the Romanian political-legal system. Based on previous research and specialized literature, I wanted to identify the main normative and functional particularities of these functions, to highlight the similarities and differences compared to other executive functions in

local administration, as well as to capture the concrete way in which the public administrator's duties are exercised in different administrative-territorial units in Romania. The analytical approach aimed both at interpreting the legal framework in force and at achieving a comparative and applied perspective on existing administrative practices.

Capitolul unu „*Statutul și rolul administratorul public potrivit codului administrativ. Analiză și comparație*” descrie rolul și atribuțiile (atribuții delegate administratorului public, respectiv: atribuții de coordonare, atribuții de ordonator principal de credite, atribuții privind politicile publice de interes local) administratorului public din perspectiva prevederilor Codului Administrativ.

In chapter two "*Comparative analysis: Public administrator vs. Deputy mayor in local public administration. Roles and responsibilities*" we aimed to highlight the elements of convergence and divergence between the two executive functions, both from the perspective of the attributions established by legal regulation, and from the perspective of their practical exercise within local administrations. The analysis took into account not only the applicable legal framework, but also the functional implications and the dynamics of institutional relations, in order to outline a clear picture of the position and relevance of each function in the decision-making process and in the management of public affairs at the local level.

Chapter three, "*Comparative Analysis of the Function and Impact of the Public Administrator in Different Administrative-Territorial Units in Romania. Case Study*", presents the analysis and interpretation of the research results on the role of the public administrator in ensuring good administration standards within seven administrative-territorial units in Romania, namely: two cities Strehaia (Mehedinți County) and Drăgănești – Olt (Olt County) and five communes Filipești de Pădure (Prohova County), Hilișeu – Horia (Botoșani County), Voitineli (Suceava County), Ostroveni (Dolj County) and Văgiulești (Gorj County). Lucrarea conține și un capitol aferent concluziilor generale fundamentate atât în baza cercetărilor teoretice (literatură de specialitate, legislație incidentă în vigoare) cât și pe baza cercetărilor practice (studiile de caz realizate).

As a result of the research conducted, we obtained relevant results that allowed us to answer the initially formulated research questions in a reasoned manner. The analysis carried out confirmed the main hypothesis according to which the public administrator position plays an essential role within the Romanian public administration, having the potential to generate significant improvements in terms of administrative efficiency, the quality of public services and the application of the principles of good governance. The conclusions formulated provide a solid basis for the development of concrete, applicative proposals, intended to contribute to the optimization of institutional performance at the local level. These proposals aim to support the process of

modernization, professionalization and efficiency of the Romanian public administration, with a direct impact on increasing the quality of the administrative act and, implicitly, on the satisfaction of citizens.

Through its contributions, our research aims to be a useful benchmark for both public decision-makers and administrative policy specialists, offering clear directions for intervention to strengthen administrative capacity and consolidate modern public management, adapted to local realities.

5. Conclusions and final proposals

The results obtained from the research can be systematized in four major analytical axes, each contributing to the configuration of an integrated perspective on the role of the public administrator in ensuring the standards of good administration. These axes concern: (1) the status of the position and the forms of employment, (2) the duties exercised and the degree of administrative involvement, (3) the perceptions of institutional actors regarding the impact of the position and (4) the functional and relational relationships between the public administrator, the deputy mayor and the rest of the administrative apparatus.

First of all, the research highlighted the fact that the majority of public administrators are employed by direct appointment, without competition, based on a decision of the mayor or the president of the county council. This practice, legal but questionable from the perspective of transparency and meritocracy, has led to an uneven professionalization of the position and to a structural dependence on the political factor.

Second, the analysis of the actual duties demonstrated that the role of the public administrator is predominantly technical and managerial, concentrated in areas such as service coordination, investment, public procurement and human resources. In contrast, strategic or financial duties – such as the position of chief authorising officer – are rarely delegated. This limitation reduces the influence of the position in the decision-making process and prevents it from reaching its full potential in local governance.

Third, the perceptions expressed by institutional actors reveal a positive receptivity towards the public administrator position, especially on the part of those who occupy this position or collaborate directly with it. Public administrators emphasized, in their responses, the contribution of the position to making the administration more efficient, while civil servants appreciated the support offered in current activities and the openness to institutional dialogue. However, deputy mayors expressed a more reserved attitude, sometimes reflecting a tension of competences or the perception of an overlap of roles.

Finally, the research highlighted an essential element: the public administrator position is not uniformly integrated into the organizational structure of city halls, but varies considerably depending on the local context, the mayor's vision, budgetary resources and organizational culture. In some ATUs, the position is well defined and active; in others, it is purely formal or even non-existent. This institutional variability reflects a lack of standardization that affects the coherence of public administration reform at national level.

Therefore, the research results demonstrate that the public administrator position has a real potential to modernize local administration, but this potential is unevenly exploited, structurally vulnerable and often dependent on local political arbitration. These findings justify the need for legislative and administrative interventions to clarify, protect and professionalize the position.

5.1. Original contributions of the thesis

The doctoral thesis "*The public administrator and his role in ensuring good governance standards*" brings a series of original and relevant contributions to the field of administrative sciences, both from a theoretical, methodological and applicative point of view. These contributions are placed in the context of a research field insufficiently explored in the Romanian specialized literature and directly aim at the substantiation, conceptualization, evaluation and validation of the public administrator function in local administration in Romania, in relation to the standards of good governance.

A first original contribution consists in introducing an extensive bibliometric analysis, using advanced tools such as Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny, applied to a corpus of 607 articles from the Web of Science database. This approach represents not only a methodological novelty in local administrative research, but also an indispensable step for identifying thematic and geographical gaps in the specialized literature. Thus, the underrepresentation of the Eastern European space in international research on local executive functions, especially in the case of Romania, was clearly highlighted. The bibliometric analysis allowed the outline of a global conceptual map, validating the need to approach the function of public administrator from an integrated and contextualized perspective.

The second significant contribution is the formulation and application of a comparative analytical framework between the public administrator and the deputy mayor positions. This parallel, rarely encountered in the specialized literature, is all the more valuable as it responds to an institutional reality specific to the Romanian public administration, where the two positions coexist, partially overlap and, sometimes, enter into competition. The thesis proposes a detailed analysis of the attributions, legal status, legitimacy and perception of the two positions, bringing into discussion

the possibility of structural conflicts, but also of possible institutional synergies, depending on the managerial vision of the local leadership.

A third original contribution lies in the participatory approach to empirical research, by applying a significant number of questionnaires among public administrators (137), deputy mayors (143) and civil servants from various UATs. This triple approach is unique in the Romanian administrative research landscape and allows for the triangulation of institutional perspectives, providing a balanced and complex picture of the public administrator function. Not only is the self-perception of the administrators analyzed, but also the way in which the function is viewed from the outside – both by political representatives and by the technical staff of the city halls.

A fourth major contribution is the identification and systematization of the concrete areas in which the public administrator function is active, based on self-assessments and context analyses. The research results indicate that public administrators are mainly involved in operational areas (public services, investments, human resources), but less in strategic areas (planning, budget, public policies), which reflects a fragmented and often incomplete application of the function. This finding allows the formulation of concrete recommendations for the expansion, professionalization and clarification of the attributions, in accordance with the principles of good governance.

In addition, the thesis contributes to the construction of a conceptual framework adapted to the Romanian context, which articulates notions such as functional autonomy, institutional legitimacy, administrative professionalization and shared governance. The function of public administrator is reconceptualized not only as an executive extension of the mayor, but as a key actor in ensuring continuity and decision-making coherence, with an intermediary role between the political sphere and the administrative apparatus.

Last but not least, the thesis has a high practical value, through the proposals formulated in the final section regarding the revision of appointment procedures, the definition of competency standards, the institutionalization of performance evaluation and the clear delimitation of attributions in relation to other local executive functions. These recommendations are formulated based on empirical evidence and can substantiate coherent administrative policies, adapted to the needs of modernization and efficiency of local public administration.

In conclusion, the original contributions of the thesis are not limited to a description of the public administrator function, but propose a genuine theoretical, analytical and normative reconstruction of it, in a context in which the professionalization and depoliticization of the administration become strategic priorities for good local governance in Romania.

5.2 Limits of research

The present research, focused on the public administrator function in local public administration in Romania, aims to provide a comprehensive, conceptual and empirical understanding of this emerging function in the architecture of local governance. Although the scientific approach is rigorously constructed, combining an in-depth theoretical analysis with an extensive applied study (through case studies, interviews and questionnaires), any academic research is subject to limitations, inherent both to methodological choices and to the institutional, normative and epistemological context in which it is carried out. The present chapter aims to critically reflect on these limitations, in order to provide scientific transparency and to outline future directions for further research.

I. Methodological limits

One of the main limitations of the research lies in the exploratory nature of the study, which privileged a deep and contextualized understanding of the public administrator function, to the detriment of a nationally representative statistical generalization. The “comparative case study” design, applied in seven administrative-territorial units, allowed for the capture of institutional diversity, but cannot guarantee representativeness for all the over 3000 UATs existing in Romania. Therefore, the results must be interpreted in an inductive manner, without the claim of an exhaustive validation on a national scale.

In the same sense, the questionnaire method, although valuable due to its quantitative dimension (331 responding UATs), was affected by a series of specific limitations:

- the response rate was variable between the categories of respondents (public administrators, deputy mayors, civil servants), which generated quantitative imbalances in certain segments of the analysis; răspunsurile au fost, în parte, influențate de caracterul autoevaluativ (în cazul administratorilor publici), respectiv de subiectivitatea percepției (în cazul funcționarilor), ceea ce poate introduce un grad de distorsiune valorică în interpretarea rezultatelor;

part of the questionnaires was completed online, which may generate differences in depth and commitment compared to those completed face to face.

Another important limitation concerns the way the questions in the questionnaire were formulated and coded, where, in some cases, the open-ended responses could not be analyzed in a unified manner due to semantic variation or lack of sufficient details. This partially affected the quality of the comparative qualitative analysis and imposed a reduction to general thematic dimensions.

Also in terms of methodology, it should be mentioned the lack of external validation of the collected data, in the sense of comparing the answers provided in the questionnaires with independent sources (e.g. data from ANFP, Ministry of Development, local audits). Thus, some statements – regarding the actual activity of the public administrator or the perceived impact on the community – could not be validated through performance indicators measurable at the macro level.

II. Epistemological limits

Although the thesis integrates a robust conceptual framework, inspired by international specialized literature (USA, UK, France, Germany), a major limitation is the limited applicability of these models in the Romanian context. For example, the conceptualization of the public administrator as a “politically neutral manager” or “guarantor of executive efficiency” presupposes a different institutional culture, in which the administration is clearly separated from political influences.

In Romania, however, the reality is marked by a frequent interpenetration between politics and administration, which makes the pure transposition of these concepts difficult. In addition, the term “good administration” (correlated with “good governance”) is still insufficiently operationalized in Romanian legislation and practice, which creates difficulties in defining clear indicators to measure the contribution of the public administrator to achieving this ideal. Thus, a limitation is recognized in the conceptualization of performance indicators specific to the function, in the absence of national standards or a unitary legislative framework.

III. Limits of the regulatory and institutional framework

Another important set of limitations is generated by the legislative ambiguity in which the public administrator position operates. Currently, the Administrative Code regulates the position only in general terms, without imposing:

- a standardized job description;
- uniform hiring criteria;
- mandatory performance evaluation mechanisms;
- standards for continuous professional training.

This lack of uniform regulation also affects research: in the absence of common reference documents (e.g. similar management contracts), the analysis becomes difficult to compare and generalize. In addition, in many cases, data on the activity of the public administrator (reports, contracts, evaluation sheets) are not public or are not available in an accessible format, which has significantly limited the transparency of documentary research.

Another limitation derives from the fact that the status of the public administrator varies considerably depending on the local political configuration. In UATs dominated by an authoritarian or clientelistic political culture, the public administrator may be reduced to a decorative role or an informal intermediary. In other cases, the position is used as a pretext for consolidating local influence networks, through appointments without competition and undefined attributions. This extreme variability reduces the ability of research to formulate universally valid conclusions.

IV. Limitations in the selection and interpretation of the cases studied

The seven in-depth case studies were strategically selected to reflect the geographical, institutional and demographic diversity of local public administration. However, it must be acknowledged that:

- in some cases, institutional collaboration with the mayors was partial, and some requested data were not provided in full;
- the functional structure of the mayors (presence/absence of the deputy mayor, size of the apparatus, local budget) directly influences the activity of the administrator, but these differences could not be fully controlled for;
- the local political context (mayor's party, relations in the local council) was not included as an analysis variable, although it profoundly influences the status and efficiency of the public administrator.

These aspects generate a limitation of the comparability between cases and require a contextualized interpretation of each study.

V. Limitations related to bibliometric analysis

The first part of the thesis is based on a rigorous bibliometric analysis, carried out on a corpus of 607 articles from the Web of Science platform. However, this method has its own limitations:

- it focuses exclusively on Anglo-Saxon literature and peer-reviewed articles, excluding works published in collective volumes, government reports, administrative strategies or public policy documents (“grey” literature), which can bring essential contributions;
- it underrepresents non-Anglophone literature (French, German, Spanish, Romanian), which leads to the exclusion of administrative models relevant for the Eastern European space;
- it does not allow the extraction of detailed case studies or contextual interpretations, but only a panoramic view of the scientific dynamics.

VI. Temporal and contextual limits

The research was conducted during 2022–2024, a period marked by political instability and legislative reforms (including in the field of public administration), as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of institutions. These factors can be considered disruptive to the normal activity of local administrations and may influence the perceptions of respondents.

Furthermore, the results reflect a snapshot, specific to the current context. A longitudinal (long-term) research could reveal significant changes over time, especially if the reforms proposed in this thesis are implemented.

By highlighting these limitations, not only a gesture of scientific honesty is outlined, but also a framework for the prudent interpretation of the conclusions formulated. This critical analysis also validates the opportunity for future research directions: sample expansion, inclusion of political variables, longitudinal analysis, international comparative research and the development of a normative model applicable in practice. Recognizing these limitations does not diminish the value of the research, but strengthens it, to the extent that it emphasizes the complexity and sensitivity of a function in the process of institutionalization and redefinition.

5.3. Practical suggestions and future research directions

Based on the research results and the theoretical-conceptual conclusions formulated in this thesis, it is necessary to outline practical proposals that will contribute to the consolidation of the public administrator position in local public administration in Romania, but also to outline future research directions capable of deepening and expanding the understanding of this institutional phenomenon.

A first proposal aims at the clear institutionalization of the procedure for occupying the public administrator position through competition, as a general rule, and the drastic limitation of direct appointments by order of the mayor or the president of the county council. The research has demonstrated that appointment without competition leads to a structural vulnerability of the position, both in terms of professionalism and autonomy. A unitary regulation is necessary at national level, which should include: minimum mandatory conditions regarding the level of education and experience, a profile of managerial and administrative skills, as well as a framework for objective performance evaluation.

Secondly, it is recommended to clarify and standardize the attributions of the public administrator function. The data showed an uneven application of this function in the territory, sometimes arbitrarily extended, sometimes reduced to a decorative role. The development of a national guide to good practices, which would establish a set of fundamental attributions compatible

with the principles of good governance, would contribute to institutional coherence and would reduce functional overlaps with deputy mayors or other actors in the executive leadership.

The third proposal aims to introduce a formal and periodic mechanism for evaluating the performance of the public administrator, based on objective criteria: the degree of implementation of decisions, the quality of service coordination, the ability to attract funds, budgetary efficiency, the relationship with the citizen, etc. This measure would contribute to the professionalization of the function and to ensuring democratic control of its activity, without limiting its autonomy.

At the same time, the research recommends strengthening the framework for continuous professional development and training for public administrators, by developing professional master's degree programs, training courses organized by the National Institute of Administration or other accredited institutions, focused on public management, administrative leadership, institutional communication and strategic planning.

Regarding future research directions, it is necessary, first of all, to expand the analysis sample to include local councilors, whose perceptions can bring additional understanding of the political positioning and influence of the position in the local power architecture. Also, longitudinal research would be useful, which would follow the evolution of the public administrator position over time, in relation to electoral cycles and legislative or political changes.

Another direction could be to compare the public administrator function in Romania with similar functions in other European states – both from the Eastern space and from Western administrations – in order to highlight the differences in structure, status, legitimacy and efficiency. Such a comparative study would allow not only the external validation of the results, but also the adoption of functional models adaptable to the Romanian context.

Finally, it is recommended to explore the ethical and deontological dimension of the public administrator function, especially in relation to the principles of neutrality, responsibility and institutional loyalty. This dimension, although normatively invoked, remains little explored empirically and deserves an in-depth investigation in future doctoral or postdoctoral studies.

Through these proposals, the thesis does not close in a theoretical formulation, but opens towards an applied dialogue between research, administrative practice and public policies, contributing to the professional reconstruction of Romanian local administration.

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