



Școala Națională de Studii Politice și Administrative
Școala Doctorală

HABILITATION THESIS

abstract

From Electronic Governance to Smart Governance: Contributions to the Digitalization of Public Administration and the Use of Artificial Intelligence

Field: Administrative Sciences

CANDIDATE:

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Abstract

The habilitation thesis entitled “From Electronic Governance to Smart Governance: Contributions to the Digitalization of Public Administration and the Use of Artificial Intelligence” presents the candidate’s scientific, academic and professional development in the field of Administrative Sciences, with a particular focus on the digital transformation of public administration, e-government, smart cities, digital education and the responsible use of artificial intelligence in the public sector. The thesis is built around the idea that public administration is no longer merely adopting digital tools for communication, archiving or procedural simplification, but is entering a deeper stage of institutional transformation in which data, interoperability, automation and artificial intelligence influence the way public institutions deliver services, formulate policies and exercise responsibility towards citizens.

The central theme of the thesis is the transition from electronic governance to smart governance. Electronic governance has traditionally been associated with the online presence of public institutions, digital communication, electronic forms, access to public information and the provision of digital public services. Smart governance, however, implies a more advanced institutional stage. It refers to the capacity of public institutions to use data, digital infrastructures, interoperable systems, artificial intelligence and citizen participation in order to produce better informed decisions, more adaptive public services and stronger mechanisms of public accountability. The thesis does not approach artificial intelligence as an unquestioned technological solution, but as a socio-technical phenomenon whose value depends on institutional capacity, legal safeguards, data quality, human oversight, transparency and democratic control.

The candidate’s academic trajectory reflects a consistent connection between technical expertise, teaching activity, applied research and institutional development. His professional relationship with the Faculty of Public Administration within the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) began through technical and digital development activities, including the creation of web resources and virtual learning environments. This initial experience later evolved into university teaching and research in information technology for public administration, e-government and digital strategies. The doctoral thesis, focused on increasing transparency in the public sector through e-government, provided the foundation for a long-term research direction that continued after the PhD through publications, applied studies, projects, conferences, editorial work and academic community-building.

The habilitation thesis systematizes the candidate’s main postdoctoral contributions in several complementary areas. The first concerns e-government and administrative transparency, reflected in books, articles and impact studies on the online presence of Romanian local public administrations. The second concerns smart cities and urban digital transformation, developed through scientific publications, conferences and research initiatives dedicated to the relationship between technology, local governance and community development. The third area concerns digital education and pedagogical innovation, including projects such as e-QUAL EDU, the development of interactive digital courses and research on the use of artificial intelligence and gamification in higher education. The fourth area concerns editorial and institutional contributions, especially the development of the Smart Cities and Regional Development (SCRD) Journal, the Smart Cities International Conference, the TRUST conference and the Smart-EDU Hub. The fifth and most recent area concerns the use of artificial intelligence in public administration, including electronic petitioning, AI-assisted public services, image analysis, smart urban management, data governance and algorithmic accountability.

The theoretical foundation of the thesis is based on a careful distinction between digitization, digitalization, digital transformation and the use of artificial intelligence in public administration. The

thesis argues that converting documents into electronic format does not, by itself, produce administrative modernization. Similarly, automating existing procedures does not necessarily lead to better governance if those procedures remain fragmented, opaque or insufficiently accountable. Smart governance is therefore understood as an institutional framework in which technology, data, administrative competences, legal norms and public service values are integrated in a coherent manner. From this perspective, artificial intelligence is examined not only as a technological resource, but also as an ethical, legal and administrative challenge.

The thesis also places particular emphasis on the current European and national regulatory environment. The European Artificial Intelligence Act, the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2024-2027, policies on open data, interoperability, cybersecurity and digital public services are treated as essential reference points for future research and public sector implementation. This normative grounding is necessary because public administration cannot adopt AI systems solely on the basis of technical performance. It must also consider legality, proportionality, protection of fundamental rights, auditability, transparency, contestability and meaningful human oversight.

The future doctoral research directions proposed in the thesis emerge from this conceptual architecture and from the candidate's postdoctoral work. These directions include algorithmic transparency, audit mechanisms for AI systems used in public administration, public data governance, interoperability of digital public services, the use of AI in petitioning and citizen communication, smart city applications, the impact of automation on the work of civil servants, AI literacy in public institutions, information resilience and the fight against disinformation. These topics can be developed through qualitative research, case studies, comparative analyses, impact assessments, user-centred evaluations of public services and digital maturity models applied to the Romanian administrative context.

Overall, the thesis demonstrates that the candidate's academic and professional development does not represent a dispersed sequence of activities, but a coherent evolution from information technology applied to public administration towards digital governance, smart cities and responsible artificial intelligence. Through his publications, coordinated projects, editorial activity, conferences, research initiatives, educational programmes and applied contributions, the candidate demonstrates the capacity to supervise doctoral research in Administrative Sciences. The main conclusion of the thesis is that artificial intelligence can contribute to the modernization of public administration only when it is embedded in a solid institutional framework oriented towards public value, democratic accountability and the strengthening of administrative capacity.