

UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST
FACULTY OF ADMINISTRATION AND BUSINESS
Doctoral School of Economic and Administrative Sciences

HABILITATION THESIS

- Abstract -

**THE RECONFIGURATION OF CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:
SYSTEMIC REFORM, PROFESSIONALIZATION, ADAPTIVE GOVERNANCE,
AND INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE**

SCIENTIFIC FIELD: Administrative sciences

Author: Morariu V. Alunica

- 2026 -

A1: ABSTRACT

The habilitation thesis entitled “The Reconfiguration of Contemporary Public Administration: Systemic Reform, Professionalization, Adaptive Governance, and Institutional Resilience” builds upon a scientific, academic and professional trajectory developed in the field of Administrative Sciences, through an interdisciplinary approach situated at the intersection of public management, administrative law, public policy, public-sector economics, organizational sociology and European studies.

The work brings together the author’s contributions regarding the transformations of contemporary public administration, examining the way in which institutional reform, the professionalization of human resources, administrative career development, human resource management in local public administration, digitalization, flexible work, intelligent technologies, inclusive governance and institutional resilience are articulated within a unified framework concerning the modernization of the public sector.

The thesis starts from the premise that public administration cannot be understood exclusively as a set of norms, structures and procedures, but must be analyzed as a complex institutional system, subject simultaneously to legislative changes, performance requirements, technological transformations, social tensions and the need to strengthen public trust. From this perspective, the work proposes an integrative reading of contemporary administration, in which legality, professional competence, administrative capacity, organizational adaptability and responsiveness toward citizens become inseparable dimensions of good governance.

Administrative reform is placed within a broader analytical framework, in which what matters is not only the modification of the regulatory framework, but also the ability of institutions to transform available rules, resources and competences into credible, accessible public services oriented toward public value. A distinctive feature of the thesis lies in the fact that the scientific results presented are supported by a methodological combination suited to the interdisciplinary nature of the field. The research integrated theoretical-doctrinal analysis, normative-institutional analysis, documentary research, comparative analysis and applied research conducted in relation to local public administration, with an emphasis on public institutions and authorities in Suceava County.

The CIP-DRU-APL and DRUAP projects provided important benchmarks for examining recruitment, selection, integration, motivation, evaluation, professional training and career development mechanisms, as well as for identifying institutional vulnerabilities that affect the efficiency and adaptive capacity of local administration.

From a methodological standpoint, the thesis assumes the contextual and applied character of a significant part of the empirical research. The data obtained through questionnaires,

institutional observation and interpretive analysis were used in a descriptive, explanatory and applied logic, aiming to identify trends, dysfunctions and needs for institutional intervention, without claiming exhaustive statistical generalizations regarding the entire national administrative system. This methodological option defines the scope of validity of the conclusions and, at the same time, allows theoretical reflection to be connected with concrete administrative realities observable at the level of institutional practice.

In the sphere of administrative reform and the civil service, the thesis develops an interpretation of administrative modernization as a process of systemic transformation, rather than as a simple succession of normative acts or formal reorganizations. The author shows that the real effects of reform are verified in the quality of administrative decision-making, institutional coherence, organizational stability, the culture of responsibility and the administration's capacity to respond to the public interest. Administrative codification, decentralization, local autonomy, remuneration, staff motivation, occupational planning and the role of key institutions, such as the National Agency of Civil Servants, the National Institute of Administration and the corps of public managers, are analyzed as elements of the same architecture aimed at strengthening administrative capacity.

The contribution developed in this direction lies in correlating civil service reform with the modernization of human resource management. Reform is not assessed only through the lens of normative instruments, but through their capacity to generate professionalization, meritocracy, transparency, institutional continuity and results orientation.

Within this logic, public administration is interpreted as a living system, whose performance depends on the quality of regulation, on the way norms are institutionalized into administrative practices and on the capacity of the professional corps to transform the principles of reform into conduct, procedures and verifiable results.

The dimension of professionalization and administrative career development is treated as an infrastructure of public performance. The thesis argues that career development is not merely an individual issue for the civil servant, but an institutional mechanism through which administration preserves its organizational memory, reproduces its competences, stabilizes its professional body and increases its capacity to respond to changes in the social and administrative environment.

The conceptual foundations of the administrative career, the regime of professional development, entry into the career, professional integration, mentoring, career planning, performance evaluation and the relationship between motivation, promotion and institutional efficiency are examined.

In this area, the author's contribution consists in articulating the relationship between the administrative career and institutional capacity. The public career is not viewed merely as a path of promotion, but as a mechanism through which public institutions can create professional continuity, predictability, accountability and performance orientation.

The empirical research conducted on public administration in Suceava County highlighted recurrent needs: the configuration of coherent professional paths, the development of credible evaluation and promotion systems, the consolidation of mentoring, the correlation of professional training with the real needs of institutions and the transformation of career development into a strategic instrument for the professionalization of administration.

Another major direction concerns the strategic valorization of the potential of human resource management in local public administration. The thesis proposes an analytical distinction between the potential of human resources and the potential of human resource management, showing that the performance of a public institution depends not only on the individual quality of its staff, but also on the organization's capacity to identify, select, integrate, evaluate, motivate, improve and coherently capitalize on this human capital. Human resource management is thus interpreted as a strategic function of local administration, not as a secondary activity of formal staff record-keeping and administration.

The applied research carried out in local public administration in Suceava County substantiated conclusions and proposals regarding the professionalization of recruitment and selection, the objectification of performance evaluation, the development of mentoring, the relationship between remuneration and motivation, the consolidation of professional training and the stimulation of institutional innovation.

One of the central ideas of the thesis is that innovation in human resource management within local public administration is not a peripheral option, but a structural condition for institutional efficiency and modernization. Local administration is analyzed as a space in which the quality of internal procedures, organizational culture, administrative leadership and adaptive capacity directly influence the quality of public services delivered to the community.

Digitalization, flexible work and intelligent technologies are examined as factors that reorganize public administration and reconfigure the relationship between institution, civil servant and citizen. In this respect, digitalization is not reduced to the introduction of IT applications or the automation of procedures, but is analyzed as a process of institutional transformation that modifies organizational structure, information flows, staff competences, administrative culture and the ways in which public services are delivered.

The analysis includes digitalization in the context of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), telework and hybrid work in the public sector, competence-based recruitment and selection, as well as the implications of intelligent technologies for human resource management. This direction is further strengthened by a recent systematic review co-authored by the candidate, examining the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in human resource management. The study shows that AI-driven efficiency gains must be assessed together with their effects on professional autonomy, employee motivation, skills, fairness and workplace inclusion. Although its empirical field is last-mile e-commerce delivery,

the proposed sociotechnical framework provides a relevant comparative basis for examining human-centred, transparent and accountable AI adoption in public-sector HRM.

The element of novelty developed in this section consists in outlining the concept of adaptive administration, understood as an administration capable of combining legality with flexibility, technology with professional judgment, efficiency with public responsibility and innovation with the protection of the general interest. The thesis emphasizes that digitalization produces administrative value only when it is connected with process reorganization, competence development, institutional interoperability, data security, service accessibility and the real needs of citizens. In the absence of these correlations, digitalization risks remaining an incomplete technical change, unable to generate authentic institutional transformation.

Inclusive public governance, social protection and institutional resilience are analyzed as expressions of the administration's capacity to manage complex public vulnerabilities. The thesis extends the field of Administrative Sciences toward topics such as public health, child protection, migration, gender equality, non-discrimination, employment, labor productivity and undeclared work, not in order to treat them as autonomous social domains, but to highlight the way in which they test the maturity of public governance. In this light, administration appears not only as a mechanism for applying norms, but as an institutional actor of protection, inclusion, equity and community resilience.

The originality of this approach lies in the integration of social issues into a coherent administrative vision, in which vulnerability, mobility and equity become indicators of the quality of governance. The role of human resources in the public health system is interpreted as a strategic infrastructure of the state; child protection is analyzed in relation to the responsibility of local administration; migration is viewed as a test of institutional resilience; equality and non-discrimination are treated as benchmarks of an administration capable of moving beyond formal neutrality and effectively supporting social inclusion. Through this opening, the thesis demonstrates that the performance of contemporary administration must be assessed not only through the internal efficiency of institutions, but also through the social effects produced in relation to vulnerable persons, groups and communities.

Beyond the scientific contributions themselves, the thesis highlights the consistency of the author's academic and professional trajectory. The progression from junior teaching assistant to associate professor, the teaching activity carried out within several bachelor's and master's programs, the supervision of bachelor's and dissertation papers, involvement in the development of study programs, the status of ARACIS evaluator, academic and institutional leadership activity, as well as experience in managing research and institutional development projects, outline a mature professional profile, capable of articulating teaching activity, scientific research and managerial responsibility.

The scientific research results obtained after the defense of the doctoral thesis are valorized through research and training grants, authored and coordinated volumes, articles published in Web

of Science-indexed journals and other international databases, UEFISCDI awards and individual or collective contributions relevant to the modernization of public administration. The research developed within the CIP-DRU-APL and DRUAP projects confirms the author's capacity to initiate, coordinate and implement complex projects, to lead research teams, to produce knowledge with scientific and applied impact and to transform empirical investigation into useful proposals for institutional development.

The plans for career evolution and development are formulated in continuity with the already consolidated research directions. They aim at developing study programs, modernizing teaching activities, strengthening the relationship between the university and public administration, expanding the activities of the Center for Training and Research in Public Administration, organizing academic and scientific events and projects, intensifying national and international cooperation, increasing the visibility of publications, supervising students in research projects and assuming future doctoral supervision activity in the field of Administrative Sciences. Within this framework, doctoral research directions are formulated regarding civil service reform, strategic human resource management, administrative digitalization, telework in the public sector, inclusive governance, competence-based recruitment and artificial intelligence in public administration.

Overall, the habilitation thesis outlines the profile of an academic and researcher with a coherent, mature and relevant trajectory in the field of Administrative Sciences. Through the theoretical, methodological, empirical and applied contributions brought together in the work, the author demonstrates the capacity to develop original reflections on contemporary public administration, to conduct scientific research, to integrate its results into academic activity and to contribute to the training of new generations of researchers.

From this perspective, the results obtained so far, corroborated with future development projects, strongly support the acquisition of the status of doctoral supervisor in the field of Administrative Sciences.

A2: Keywords

Public administration; administrative reform; civil service; human resource management; administrative professionalization; career development; administrative career; adaptive governance; adaptive administration; administrative capacity; administrative codification; decentralization; local autonomy; local public administration; public administration digitalization; telework in the public sector; hybrid work; artificial intelligence in human resource management; algorithmic management; merit-based recruitment; performance evaluation; institutional innovation; local governance; inclusive public governance; social services; social protection; child protection; DGASPC Suceava; public health; institutional resilience; social vulnerability.