



Paula-Andra Pruneci

**Unfolding the Migration of Digital Capacities within the Romanian Government.
An Analysis of the Underlying Rationales for Institutional Reform.**

Master Thesis

at the Chair for Information Systems and Information Management
(Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität, Münster)

Supervisor: Dr. Veiko Lember
Co-Supervisor: Dr. Amirouche Moktefi
Presented by: Paula-Andra Pruneci

Date of Submission: 2023-07-18

Abstract

This thesis aims to discover what were the potential factors and drivers that led to the reconfiguration of digitalisation-related capacities within the Romanian Government and the creation of the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, and, respectively, of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation. Consequently, the study tries to get behind the arguments which have already been portrayed within the normative frameworks of the reforms and further build an array of prevailing rationales which could explain what the motives behind the interplay between centralisation and decentralisation of digital coordination at the level of the Government were. The research was approached from multiple angles, by operationalising the *Environmental Pressures*, *Cultural Factors* and *Polity Features* variables of the transformative perspective depicted by Christensen and Lægreid (2016), with a view to analyse the complexities behind the governmental choices of November 2019–December 2020. Given the utter lack of research on the chosen case, eight semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders from the public sector – formerly or currently connected to the aforementioned public entities and their institutional predecessors – have been conducted. In order to support their claims, the results have been triangulated with either assisting assertions from the existing corpus of literature, or normative acts, which depicted the historical red thread of the wider narrative. The final analysis led to a nuanced picture of the rationales behind the current setting because technical pressures, such as the increased need to streamline digitalisation endeavours and align with EU market demands, were juxta positioned with an ingrained battle over resource distribution. While most of the respondents have asserted that the first setting, which placed digitalisation at the centre of the Government was the most beneficial one, given the fact that digital transformation is considered to be a horizontal topic, the second reform, which established the (re-)organisation of a ministry in charge of digitalisation, was pictured rather as a desiderate of the political factor to ensure a more distributed power over EU resource allocation.

Content

Figures	V
Tables	VI
Abbreviations	VII
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Definition of the Puzzle	2
1.2 Gaps in Existing Research	4
1.3 Structure of the Thesis	5
2 Conceptual Framework	7
2.1 A Synopsis on the Public Sector Realm	7
2.1.1 Public Administration versus Public Management	8
2.1.2 Administrative Institutions within the Public Sector	10
2.1.2.1 Institutional Governance	11
2.1.2.2 Institutional Performance and Administrative Capacity	13
2.2 Digitalisation as Disruptor to Governmental Structures?	16
2.2.1.1 eGovernment	17
2.2.1.2 eGovernance	18
2.2.1.3 Governmental Adaptation Strategies to Digital Transformation ...	19
2.3 Institutional Reform	20
2.3.1 Veto Players within Reform Instances	21
2.3.1.1 Overview of Roles	22
2.3.1.2 Decision-Making across Governmental Instances	23
2.3.1.3 The Debate over Coordination	25
2.4 Theoretical Frameworks behind Institutional Reforms	27
2.4.1 The Transformative Perspective	30
3 Research Design and Methodology	32
3.1 Research Aim and Objectives	32
3.2 Unfolding the Onion Approach	33
3.3 Data Handling	40
3.3.1 Data Collection	40
3.3.1.1 Literature Collection	40
3.3.1.2 Interviews Collection	42
3.3.2 Data Analysis	45
3.3.2.1 Literature Analysis	45
3.3.2.2 Interview Analysis	45
4 The Case of Romania	48
4.1 Brief Polity Background	48
4.1.1 A Tradition of Legalistic Reform	50
4.2 The Narrative of Romanian Digitalisation	51
4.2.1 Latest Ministerial Reconfigurations	54
5 Results	59
6 Discussions	74
7 Conclusion	81
7.1 Limitations and Future Research	82

References	85
Appendix	93

Figures

Figure 1. Policy Cycle, reproduced from Newton and Deth (2009a)	24
Figure 2. Research Onion Approach, reproduced from Saunders et al. (2019)	34
Figure 3. Institutional Reform under GEO no. 68/2019 and GEO no. 90/2019	55
Figure 4. Institutional Reform under GEO no. 212/2020	57

Tables

Table 1. Interview Respondents	44
Table 2. Total References depicted within the Body of Interviews	46

Abbreviations

ADR	Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ARDA	Agency for the Romanian Digital Agenda
DESI	Digital Economy and Society Index
EDPR	Europe's Digital Progress Report
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEO	Governmental Emergency Ordinance
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IOPIS	Intermediate Organisation for the Promotion of the Information Society
MCIS	Ministry of Communications and Information Society
MRID	Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation
MTIC	Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Communications
NPM	New Public Management
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Public Administration
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
PM	Prime Minister
RQ	Research Question

1 Introduction

As society is confronted with more and more challenging occurrences, the requirement to thoroughly review and adapt previously established institutional frameworks becomes ever more crucial. However, structure stands out as one of the few components that aids in the definition and explanation of intricate institutional challenges, which often call for comprehensive investigations. Consequently, structure is also regarded as a key contextual variable which additionally could assist in the detangling of the multifaceted dimensions of public institutions. According to Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2011, as cited in Hwang and Colyvas 2011), in a multifarious environment, such as the public sector, institutions are oftentimes regarded as the lasting facets of the social and political environment, which seem to have an impact on citizen's decisions and opinions through the provision of action, reasoning, and emotion. However, scholars further contended that deviation from the provisions of the above stated opinion-steering elements could be potentially linked with certain consequences (Lawrence et al. 2011, as cited in Hwang and Colyvas 2011), which are, oftentimes, aggregated as a disarrangement of existing orders.

Deviation from the seemingly established order of things is a fairly typical phenomenon for the public sector climate, which, according to Van de Walle (2016), is oftentimes pressured by significant shifts that alter or transform its previous systems in a struggle for adaptation. Such claims have been previously strengthened by numerous scholars, such as Dawes (2008), who asserted that various disruptors, such as the advent of novel digital technologies have penetrated every surface of existence in the past decades, stretching from the private to the public administration (PA) realms. Consequently, the advent of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) alters the previously established mandates of arrangement in the public sector and call for rethinking of capacities and for finding efficient coordination tools capable of managing the – now highly urged – digital services (Wouters et al. 2021).

According to Christensen and Lægreid (2016) the current complex dynamics of the public sector influence how governmental bodies – which are usually in charge of the execution side – are set up, adjusted to new conditions, or even dissolved. Consequently, thorough thought on the structures and decision-making configurations becomes of utmost importance for institutions, particularly those in the governmental sector, in order to adjust swiftly and effectively to new settings. With the help of adaptive governance instruments, administrative bodies are expected to adjust promptly as a means to successfully cope with modifications that, if poorly handled, may prove destructive (Janssen and Van Der Voort 2017). Moreover, numerous academics have emphasised the

employment of numerous adaptive approaches, such as lean government (Miller 2009; Radnor 2010) or transformational government (Bannister and Connolly 2014; Braams et al. 2021; Janssen and Estevez 2013), to have been proven to assist previous government structures in their adjustment to the novel requirements driven by digital transformation.

Therefore, one first inference would be that public structures must become more malleable and shape accordingly to comply with contemporary requirements or correct any institutional shortcomings that might prevent them from keeping up with various emergent trends. Sometimes, such endeavours lead to what is generally understood as the process of reform. However, Thoenig (2013) asserts that reforms within the public dimensions are oftentimes characterised by a lack of “*simplicity and clarity*” (Thoenig 2013, p. 9). This therefore enhances a first claim in support of the argument that the topic of administrative reform necessitates further investigation with regard to its incipient root causes, drivers and motivations that might steer public stakeholders into such transformative endeavours.

According to Fountain (2007), a conventional definition of bureaucratic reform comprises all the structural-administrative and legal enhancements in government departments as a way to better accommodate the general public’s needs, as well as to promote an increased performance and efficiency within the area of service delivery. Therefore, reform is typically linked to shifts and stronger institutional processes (Denis et al. 2009) which could aid in solving existing problems or tackling novel challenges (Fountain 2007). Furthermore, Denis et al. (2009) assert that executives in the public sector face various difficulties while concurrently changing the infrastructures of an organisation and that they must consider a novel approach in relation to their organisational strategy too.

1.1 Definition of the Puzzle

Due to the high degree of contextual granularity of reforms’ rationales, selecting a particular case study becomes an implicit requirement. As to further reflect on previous claims, one of the major issues confronting Romania’s administration of reforms, according to Hînțea (2020), concerns the absence of consistency and steadiness over a diverse range of time frames. Hence, Hînțea (2020) argued that, in one manner or another, every novel administration within the Romanian realm seems to aspire to reinvent itself, to reject the actions of the one before it, and to constantly shift its opinion on improvement, which oftentimes throws off the structure of the government and its institutions, as they were previously known. Additionally, such accounts could be observed in the distribution of digital capabilities at various levels of the government and, implicitly, of the institutional arrangements that emerged between the months of November 2019 and December 2020.

As a result, the institutional reforms of 2019–2020 radically repositioned the governmental distribution of digital capacities into an order which continues to stand consistent to this day. Therefore, a plethora of institutions were in charge of the digitalisation topic before 2019, among which the Ministry of Communications and Information Society (MCIS) represented a pillar of reference, as observed throughout multiple European Commission reports (European Commission 2016a, 2018, 2019). However, the Governmental Emergency Ordinance (GEO) 68/2019 has rearranged the institutional hierarchies within the sector of digital transformation by disbanding and merging former ministries and transferring some of their attributions to a newly formed entity, coined as the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania (ADR) (Romanian Government 2019, art. 11, para. 2). Therefore, within this governmental act, the – now former – Ministry of Communications and Information Society was merged with the Ministry of Transport into what was then known as the Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Communications (Romanian Government 2019a, art. 5, para. 1). Moreover, the ADR then received the activities and structures from the Agency for Romania’s Digital Agenda (ARDA), which was previously subordinated to the now disbanded MCIS (Romanian Government 2019, art. 5, paras. 1-2, respectively art. 11, para. 2.). The very same GEO centralised the government’s oversight on the topic of digitalisation, as ADR was back then placed under the direct coordination of the Prime Minister (PM) (Romanian Government 2019a), art. 11, para. 2). A month later, in December 2019, ADR received an additional number of two bodies, along with their structures and staff, from the recently formed Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Communications (Romanian Government 2019b, art 1., paras. 1-2), but nonetheless remains under the coordination of the Prime Minister.

A year later, however, in December 2020, these previously established structures shifted again, through the GEO 212/2020. Therefore, the Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Communications partially divides, and transfers all its attributions in the communications sphere to a newly established ministerial body, named the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation (MRID) (Romanian Government 2020, art. 3, paras. 1-2, art. 4, para. 2, pt. b). Additionally, the research component within the new ministry has been taken over from the former Ministry of Education and Research, who now parted too into the Ministry of Education (Romanian Government 2020, art. 4, paras. 1-2, pt. a). Additionally, ADR has been moved from the coordination of the Prime Minister and subordinated to this newly established MRID (Romanian Government 2020, art. 7).

1.2 Gaps in Existing Research

While a more detailed reflection of the previously illustrated occurrences is provided later within the corpus of this thesis, it is of utter importance to comprehensively assert that these institutional reforms shifted the topic of digitalisation from centralised to decentralised streams, under various governmental arrangements. However, there is a paucity of research on the potential drivers and foundational rationales behind these reform projects. Moreover, although the discussion of public service quality (Petrescu and Mihalache 2020) and digitalisation (Antonescu et al. 2022; Iftimiei 2021; Radu and Petcu 2021; Stoica and Ghilic-Micu 2020) has been addressed by a number of scholars from 2019 to present times, their writings oftentimes neglect an empirical investigation into potential drivers that might have steered these specific reforms and transitions of capacities.

According to Denis et al. (2009), a plethora of issues can emerge when such transformations are erratic or are lacking an easily comprehensible strategic viewpoint. However, the topic of digital competencies' migration inside Romanian governmental organisations lacks numerous investigational depths in relation to its underlying reasons and motivation, which could potentially give rise to a plethora of predictions and assessments on the prospects ahead of Romanian digital transformation.

By delineating the aforementioned, this thesis therefore attempts to tackle the Research Question (RQ) of:

What were the underlying factors driving the Romanian Government's decision to pursue the institutional reforms of November 2019–December 2020, associated with the new structural model of digital policy coordination and implementation?

However, given the complexity of assessing such a RQ, additional secondary research questions have been established:

- (i) Sub-Question: What were the stakeholders' views on the institutional reforms of November 2019–December 2020 within the larger administrative Romanian setting?
- (ii) Sub-Question: What were the stakeholders' views on the rationales behind the reforms of November 2019–December 2020?
- (iii) Sub-Question: What do the previously extracted empirical observations depict about the prospects of digital transformation within the Romanian administration?

The first sub-question attempts to grasp stakeholders' perspectives on the institutional reforms of 2019–2020 and to operationalise the first interplay between environmental pressures, polity features and cultural factors, the pre-established variables depicted by Christensen and Lægheid (2016) within their assertions on the transformative approach theory. However, a thorough description of the employed framework can be depicted in the *The Transformative Perspective* sub-section of the *Conceptual Framework* chapter. Moreover, the middle sub-question strives to measure how the previously mentioned variables of Christensen and Lægheid (2016) have additionally impacted the motivations behind the execution of the selected reforms. Ultimately, the last sub-question tries to illustrate potential scenarios for the future of digital transformation within the given domestic climate, as reflected with the aid of the formerly collected empirical observations.

Besides various arguments that have been retrieved within official governmental documents, such as specific GEOs, which mainly reflected the low ranking of Romania within the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) scoreboard (Băițan 2018), and the need to comply with commitments related to the status of Member State, there is a lack of assessment of all the reasons which contributed to the ever-changing configuration of digital capacities within the chosen time frame of reference. Consequently, the research problem of identifying the potential, yet uncovered, motives behind the previously depicted reform becomes highly relevant and has the potential to further enrich existing literature on the topic of digitalisation in the Romanian setting.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

In order to achieve this thesis' aim, namely obtaining a thorough answer to the formerly portrayed research questions, a thorough structure has been set. Given that the core point of the research issue is complexly intertwined with the notions of institutional reform and digital transformation, the first chapter meticulously portrays, in a comprehensive *Conceptual Framework*, various scholarly angles on these concepts and a detangling of their various facets. Additionally, an overview of various theoretical frameworks that have been previously employed by various scholars across time is offered, with greater emphasis placed on the transformative perspective, as depicted in Christensen and Lægheid's (2016) writings. The *Research Design and Methodology* chapter unfolds not only the layers of Saunders' et al. (2019) onion, but also the steps that have been undertaken in the data collection and analysis processes, along with a description depicting the selection and relevance of the interviewed subjects. Furthermore, *The Case of Romania* chapter dovetails a brief polity background and an assessment of the previous scholarly accounts on Romanian administrative reform together with the peculiarities of

the digital policy-making sphere, with an emphasis on the latest ministerial reconfigurations. The *Results* chapter triangulates the empirically collected assertions of the interviewees with additional sources, in order to validate the participants' assertions. Nonetheless, while the *Discussions* chapter aimed at assessing what the depicted results reflect about Romania's public administration and coordination of digital policymaking, the *Conclusions* chapter strived to encapsulate comprehensive answers to all the posed RQs and to inform readers on the limitations and future research angles emerging from this thesis.

2 Conceptual Framework

Delineating a thorough conceptual framework represents a significant step in the process of research, as it sets out to define the notions at play and retrieve the most prevalent theories within the spectrum of the chosen topic, while highlighting the existing gaps in the literature. As Bryman (2012) puts it, the theoretical framework helps in the development of research questions, which are consequently driven by the depicted theoretical gaps and challenges. Accordingly, the aim of this chapter is to outline and interconnect the notions relevant to this thesis' research, as to better reflect the complexity of the topic and to inform on the later methodological choices.

Therefore, this chapter dives into the intricacies of the public sector and sets out to comprehensively map the various notions relevant to the realm of public administration, such as public management, public institutions, governance, administrative capacity, and more. This has been achieved with a view to thus define the main building blocks within the boundaries of this research and help in the appropriate formulation of the research question. This second segment of this chapter is dedicated to defining several disruptors to traditional executive structures, such as the rise of digitalisation and the need for administrations to keep up with new trends, as to delve deeper into the specific ministerial sector placed at the crux of this study.

The third sub-chapter, on the other hand, highlights the institutional changes through which public organisations undergo in order to keep up with new challenges and maintain performance. This is mainly depicted by detangling the dimensions of institutional reform, with its ensuing causes, means and decision-making processes. These are further explained via the identification of several notable theoretical frameworks, in the last section of this chapter.

2.1 A Synopsis on the Public Sector Realm

In today's world, *structure* is an ongoing topic of examination when it comes to extremely convoluted areas of assessment, such as states and their public sector complexities. Additionally, as previously asserted in the *Introduction* chapter, individuals can be aided in the attempt to comprehend intricate arrangements by disassembling them into manageable components as a result of *structure*: a critical element which serves as a foundation for arranging and categorising various dimensions under scrutiny. Moreover, structure provides a solid basis for systems to function within a climate, rendering it less prone to errors, and making it easier for individuals to function collectively as a cohesive unit (Ahmady et al. 2016). Ahmady et al. (2016) refer to this as *organisational structure*.

From a broad standpoint – and disregarding the various systems of government – states also have their own organisational structures. Therefore, *modern states* can be described as complex entities that create and uphold laws which are enforceable to the inhabitants of a particular region (Newton and Deth 2012a). However, states can only achieve such premises by having a clear delineation of various structures and organisational functions, given their aforementioned complexity. For instance, the act of proposing and implementing such legislation on various domains of the state is known as legislating (Newton and Deth 2012b), and is being performed by the legislative branch. Usually, the legislative, along with the judicial – which interprets the law – and the executive – which administers the law – branches make up the “*trias politica*” (Hooghe and Marks 2003, p. 237) framework, a prevalent framework for contemporary democracies. Ultimately, the plethora comprising all these aspects of social, economic, and political life which are being administered or governed by the states’ authorities can be characterised as integral parts of what can widely be defined as the *public sector* (Newton and Deth 2012c).

2.1.1 Public Administration versus Public Management

On the one hand, the concrete delegation of state power throughout the public sector realm could be evaluated by structural characteristics of certain areas for which the state provides various services to the citizens (Barrios-Suvelza 2012). On the other hand, Scott (1975) reveals how prior scholars explored the ramifications of organisational characteristics by purely interpreting the structure element as given. In other words, the structure of organisations can also be regarded solely as the environment in which the investigation of other relevant factors occurs (Scott 1975). Although structure oftentimes is defined as an integral part of the setting, the aim of this thesis rather follows Barrios-Suvelza’s delineation and strives to explore what are the connections between specific institutional structures, and the underlying rationale that drives stakeholders to opt for reforming them.

Consequently, the issue of conceptually delineating the term of *administration* arises. This is precisely because, according to Newton and Deth (2012b), administration can be viewed through two distinct descriptive lenses. Therefore, while the previously mentioned scholars contend that some might associate administration to the procedures of bureaucratic management, others may simply view administration as connected to the executive realm (Newton and Deth 2012b). To grasp a better understanding of these two notions, it is important to underline that *bureaucratic management* of administration could therefore be perceived as an approach that stresses close compliance to the above-mentioned legislations, protocols, and hierarchies at the institutional level (Newton and Deth 2012d). However, this thesis delves deeper into the structures of the executive realm,

which is handled by the bureaucratic sector or, to put it simply, by the ministries of the government. These are often organised around the primary responsibilities of the state, including domestic affairs, communications, finance and other, depending on various countries' arrangements (Newton and Deth 2012d).

While informal institutions and administrative autonomy undoubtedly play a role in the functioning of a government, bureaucracy has a significant impact on public administration within the parameters of everyday decision-making and, according to 't Hart et al. (1993), it is considered the most effective way to characterise how public administration is internally structured. This is because the various sectoral divisions or ministries within the government handle every aspect of implementation of policies and, consequently, the management of the state.

As previously highlighted by Newton and Deth (2012d), the set of ministries differs from nation to nation given that there does not exist an ideal method to divide these functions accordingly throughout various administrative realms. In certain ones, for instance, ministries are merged together if the areas they address are in some capacity related, yet in others, ministries are kept apart or fractured down (Newton and Deth 2012d), as a result of various domestic motives and rationales. Moreover, the forms of government play an essential role in this executive power distributions. On the one hand, in parliamentary structures, the government's cabinet is made up of elected representatives from the ruling party, who are in control of the several ministries (Newton and Deth 2012d). On the other hand, in presidential systems, the heads of the highest-ranking ministries of government can set up a cabinet, although they are often chosen by the president and accountable to him (Newton and Deth 2012d).

Moreover, the realm of PA literature does not only refer to bureaucracy and administration as key elements of structural organisation. Subsequently, several other highly important notions, such as public management, have received sizable consideration within the past decades. According to Lynn (2013), the notions of *public management* and *public administration* might overlap occasionally. However, public management initially emerged as an extension of governance – which will be later on defined – or, in other words, as a legal framework specifically designed for regulating how public managers utilise the power conferred by the state (Lynn 2013). Consequently, numerous theories have emerged on how public management should therefore be efficiently ran and on what premises are current public management arrangements performant. However, from Lynn's (2013) standpoint, effective public management entails two interconnected components: legal power delegation and the monitoring of this distribution of power.

The construction of frameworks and the consolidation of structures which maintain an appropriate equilibrium between these two concepts is the central challenge of “*public management as a structure of governance*” (Bertelli and Lynn 2001, as cited in Lynn 2013, p. 8). Therefore, maintaining this governance equilibrium on all these power distribution scenarios within state organisation comes with its own challenges. For instance, Lynn (2013) emphasised that making sure that public management is adequately governed by the formerly mentioned “*trias politica*” of Hooghe and Marks (2003, p. 237) is one of the main examples of such challenges. However, finding that perfect equilibrium between capacity and power continues to be a contentious issue in public administration (Lynn 2013). Moreover, the cause of unsuccessfully performed public administration reforms usually stems from not achieving the above-mentioned equilibrium.

2.1.2 Administrative Institutions within the Public Sector

The aforementioned ultimately imply that all these processes and administrative facets which are being placed at the core of the modern state’s public sector are being essentially operationalised by and within public institutions. Given their increased complexity and their role in steering public opinion, institutions have been placed at the crux of many scholarly research writings and continue to be a valuable research focus, as previously enhanced by Lawrence et al. (2011, as cited in Hwang and Colyvas 2011). This is partly because, as asserted by Lepsius (2016), the processes of social evolution are characterised by institutional establishment, institutional divergence, and institutional reform. Conversely, scholars have contended that defining the notion of institution proves to be a challenging task (Aghion 2006). Therefore, before delving into these highly debated occurrences within the governmental realm, it is of utmost importance to delineate what one understands when referring to such an entity.

North and Thomas (1973, as cited in Aghion 2006) introduced the idea that institutions are fundamentally social frameworks that lower transactional costs and minimise ambiguity among various players of a certain field of activity. Jepperson (1991, as cited in Lepsius 2016), however, provides a more structured stance, asserting that institutions could be portrayed as thoroughly shaped and standardised processes, performing under a certain form of authority. Nonetheless, on a rather more analytical stance, several scholars contend that it has never been readily evident or universally agreed upon how institutions portray authority in relation to various internal operations (Meyer 2008), and therefore how their authority is reflected. However, Scott (1975, 1987) contends that institutions represent symbolic and behavioural systems that incorporate normative, representative, and constitutional principles along with oversight structures that establish a shared understanding system and develop certain procedure patterns. Moreover, this view is

reinforced by Meyer and Rowan (1977), who agreed that institutional settings could be viewed as social behaviours, duties, or realities that develop a guiding principle for activity in public behaviour and cognition, which could be therefore attributed to their oversight capabilities.

2.1.2.1 Institutional Governance

Above all, institutions could be shaped as a fundamental guidance cornerstone of social, political, and organisational life. They influence decisions, viewpoints, and behaviour on a larger scale (Lawrence et al. (2011), as cited in Hwang and Colyvas 2011), as they encompass not only regulations, but also social norms and cognitive processes. As it has been previously illustrated by numerous scholars, these forms of organisation also include governance frameworks, which deal with how this authority is mirrored and distributed within the institutional bodies. Therefore, the notion of governance might be a good puzzle piece that could be used as to further detangle these intricate dimensions and realities. This is because governance can be viewed as the main element overseeing and linking together various administrative structures and institutional realms, a mere equivalent to the authority concept, which was previously addressed by Lepsius (2016) in the above-mentioned instances.

According to Marche and McNiven (2003), the distinction between the concepts of government and governance refers to various facets of the interaction between citizens and the existing political structures within a given climate. This is why a clear delineation between these two complex terms is needed. Marche and McNiven (2003) assess that if, when thinking about government, one places more emphasis on how choices are implemented, governance should be regarded as the element which places more emphasis on how decisions are made. However, it is relevant to underline that both assume a connected impact in the political ecosystem (Marche and McNiven 2003).

From the standpoint of public management, a suitable definition of governance involves a system of regulations and administrative processes which specify, restrict, and facilitate executive power for the benefit of the wider community (Hill and Hupe 2009; Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill 2001, as cited in Lynn 2013). Essentially, each law, strategy, or policy has various implications for public administration since they are constituting the governance of various institutional structures (Lynn 2013). However, governance does not only incorporate laws and regulations, but is rather a composite of individuals, inter-institutional and intra-institutional relationships, with all their intricately pieced-together legislations, rules, informal agreements, or formal administrative procedures, which form the governance apparatus.

Within their work, Pugh et al. (1963) have attempted to demonstrate that Weber's insights regarding bureaucracy could be transformed into a collection of empirically verifiable assumptions relevant for the study of institutional structures and authority distribution within the context of public administration. Consequently, the authors came up with several relevant key organisational dimensions, among which centralisation and configuration have been underscored (Pugh et al. 1963). The centralisation dimension has been referred to as the exact positionings of an organisation's decision-making power, whereas the configuration variable referred to the structuring of this power, a framework of connections between policymakers' functions and tasks articulated in terms of structures (Pugh et al. 1963). It is highly essential to underscore these dimensions of organisational assessment, as they will prove highly relevant in the ultimate analysis of the data collected within the scope of this study.

Five years later, Meyer (1968) strengthened the claims of Pugh et al., by asserting that the Weberian idea of bureaucratic authority has been crucial to the understanding of formal organisations, such as the institutions in the public administration domain. Moreover, these concepts are crucial in the evaluation of structural changes at the executive level of public institutions, as they help in tracing the nature of institutional rearrangements and aid in formulating the right inquiries to uncover the potential motivations for such endeavours. However, in order to be able to formulate the appropriate directions for research, one has to closely scrutinise the specific institutional climate. According to Hsu et al. (1983), the idea that circumstances hold a significant impact on power distribution and institutional structure has remained a topic of ongoing discussion since the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, without delving into the subject of the discussion just yet and constructing on these two premises, it is thus crucial for one to remain cognisant that, while structure matters, it always remains contextual.

Due to its contextuality, it is critical to be extremely exact when examining structure within distinct types of executive institutions, as structural frameworks determining power distribution can have numerous facets. Different nations, organisations, or administrative levels with various legislative and political backgrounds all have unique structures and distinct institutions, as it has been previously mentioned. Consequently, it is worth underscoring once again that understanding structures and power games within large institutions, such as governmental ministries, is at the crux of this thesis. However, given the complexity of this topic, a delineation is necessary. Therefore, an analysis focused specifically on the governmental climate and historical narrative of the Romanian executive realm, with a focus on the digitalisation sector, will be provided within *The Case of Romania* chapter of this thesis.

As previously assessed, the distribution of power within an institution plays an essential role in its assessment process, as frameworks supporting equitable power distribution can additionally foster legitimacy, integrity, and transparency (Persson, Roland and Tabellini, 1997, as cited in Tommasi and Weinschelbaum 2007). To reach a finality on this notion, the governance of an institution should be viewed as inclusive with regard to aspects of division of power, as this affects how judgments originate and power is distributed inside its structures. Additionally, it is common knowledge that, while authority should be concentrated in a manner in which it allows for efficient and effective decision-making, it should additionally be dispersed so that it fosters and ensures a culture of inclusion, transparency, and openness.

The formerly mentioned were highlighted with a view to underscoring that institutions are therefore not always efficient or effective, which sometimes comes at the cost of institutional reform. In broad terms, reforms in public administration refer to planned, methodical adjustments performed to the operations, procedures, and policies of public institutions (Lynn 2013). Governmental reforms, as the focal dimension of this thesis, are, as contented by Lynn (2013), generally meant to boost overall government performance. Subsequently, just like in the case of ministerial arrangements, there is no universal rationale for pursuing such restructuring endeavours. The legal domain in terms of reform alludes to changes to the laws stipulating how governments operate, which could entail updating of current laws or passing new legislation, all with the aim to boost existing systems of governance (Lynn 2013). However, the concept of reform will be thoroughly addressed only later within this chapter.

Within the scope of this sub-section, what one should bear in mind is that the capacity of institutions when it comes to reducing transaction costs and satisfying societal demands is a key factor which explains their persistence. Through a logical inference, institutions persist mainly due to the fact that altering their current ways of functioning comes at an expense. This implies that, ultimately, one of the means through which one can evaluate the costs of institutional rearrangements is by measuring their administrative capacity and resulted performance.

2.1.2.2 Institutional Performance and Administrative Capacity

According to Wynen et al. (2016), the accelerated shifts in nowadays' society, financial strains, geopolitical turmoil, and rising performance expectations for the public sector have contributed to making the climate in which governmental entities function highly unstable. Having these considerations in mind, one has to pay attention to the administrative capacity of institutions. According to El-Taliawi and Van der Wal (2019, as cited in Haque et al. 2021), the notion of *administrative capacity* has lately evolved

into the administrative aspect of the state's capacity, and it is frequently employed in administrative and policy research (Haque et al. 2021). Given its importance when one talks about state-related topics, from financial effectiveness, economic expansion, policy execution, and to the general development of the country, the administrative capacity's operational application is emphasised (Cingolani 2013; El-Taliawi and Van Der Wal 2019; Haque et al. 2021).

Therefore, this notion is of utter significance for the study of public institutions nowadays. Moreover, if one strives to understand the intricate realities that are at play within the public institutional realm, comprehending its ramifications is of utmost importance. As shown above, this conceptual term measuring various dimensions of institutional nature is related to the concept of *performance*, yet not equivalent. In his section on finding the precursors to government performance, Moynihan (2013) gathered a wide range of measurable elements that potentially sew together the thread leading to ultimate governmental efficiency and effectiveness in pursuing various policy agendas. From structure, with all its ensuing components, to objectives' clarity, strategic mindset, cultural variables, political backing, and effective leadership: they all have been identified as variables that model and are tied to a government's success (Moynihan 2013) in its various domain-related endeavours. Although scholarly research has employed a multi-disciplinary variance in terms of how these concepts of performance and administrative capacity have been interpreted, the idea of capacity itself is still somewhat contentious (Hanson and Sigman 2013, as cited in Haque et al. 2021).

Williams (2020, as cited in Haque et al. 2021) argues that institutional or administrative capacity remains a preferable umbrella-term, as it combines the factors that define both administrative performance and policy implementation. On the one hand, one could therefore link this term to an overall operational ability of institutions within their functional realm. On the other hand, objective and subjective performance metrics have been defined and constitute two of the main categories of indicators that measure institutional or administrative performance (Andrews, Boyne, and Walker 2006; Song and Meier 2018, as cited in Zhang et al. 2022). The gross domestic product's (GDP) growth rate, or the volume of services supplied are two of a few instances of objective measurements (Zhang et al. 2022). Therefore, scholars have contended that this type of metrics focus on external, identifiable occurrences. According to Andersen, Boesen, and Pedersen (2016, as cited in Zhang et al. 2022), subjective metrics are then instances of, for example, perceived dishonesty of bureaucrats or the level of citizen contentment with the current services and are rather based on internal judgments. Consequently, while congruent, the concepts of performance and administrative capacity are still portraying

significant differences, given that institutional capacity is a rather internal metric which focuses on the institutional ability to reach a desired performance.

Owing to the fact that it has been placed among the primary conditions that governments must achieve in the procedure of entering the European Union (EU), the origins of interest for the topic of administrative capacity date back to 1997 (Alexandru and Guziejewska 2020). Alexandru and Guziejewska (2020) enforce the fact that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was back then offering a broader, yet more aligned definition of this intricate concept. According to OECD (1995, as cited in Alexandru and Guziejewska 2020), the notion of administrative capacity defines the method through which people or entities improve their ability to carry out fundamental tasks within their field of interest. Therefore, this concept sums up most of the building blocks that allow institutions, at organisational or structural level, to reach their sector-related targets.

Moreover, in accordance with the very same definition (OECD 1995, as cited in Alexandru and Guziejewska 2020), this concept measures an institution's capacity for addressing certain issues, establishing and accomplishing the right goals in order to overcome them. This implies that administrative capacity additionally comprises the notion of identifying the appropriate solutions to tackle existing issues. Additionally, this capacity also quantifies whether the institutions comprehend and address their developmental requirements in a resilient way (Alexandru and Guziejewska 2020). In other words, administrative capacity computes the ability of an organisation to achieve performance. In consequence, it is important for one to understand that all these facets of institutional capacity are aligned, or rather directed at reaching certain agendas, goals, or objectives. Owing to the above-mentioned, the concept of capacity should rather be viewed as another factor that could potentially contribute to the shaping of institutional structures and should be placed within the spectrum of analysis of organisational reform within the governmental realm.

In order to identify those sectors that need improvement as to reach performance and enhance the capacity of an institution, authorities can carry out studies – or delegate competent bodies to do so –, and thoroughly examine existing knowledge on the issue at hand. These processes meticulously lead one back to the concept of structure. According to Scott (1981, as cited in Egeberg 2013), an organisational structure represents a prescriptive framework made up of regulations and positions that explicitly define who is supposed to carry out the specific tasks and responsibilities and how to accomplish the set objectives. As a result, the structure substantially outlines the desires and agendas that

are to be achieved, as well as the factors and choices that need to be taken into account for accomplishing the aforementioned set goals (Egeberg 2013).

But there are many aspects of organisational structure and administrative capacity that are related to the process of reform. For instance, dimension, or the mere volume of positions that need to be occupied can serve as a good indicator of an organisation's capacity to formulate rules, come up with alternative options, or execute decisive solutions. Moreover, the way in which a government disperses certain specialisations across its institutions furthermore reflects the way in which power is executed within that sectoral domain. For instance, horizontal specialisation describes the relationship between or the dissociation of several concerns and policy domains (Egeberg 2013). Separating domains at the bottom just moves synchronisation accountability to higher positions in a hierarchical structure (Egeberg 2013). Based on Gulick (1937, as cited in Egeberg 2013), responsibilities could be dispersed horizontally across units in several manners, notably in connection with the sectorial goals, or functionality of processes. The intentional distribution of workforce among levels of authority inside and outside organisations constitutes an example of *vertical specialisation*. This second type of arrangement could indicate if cooperation is meant to be collaborative or hierarchical (Egeberg 2013).

Despite the fact that several investigations have taken at least one aspect of organisational structure into consideration when assessing the performance of organisations in the public sector, no persistent relationship between the structural dimensions and organisational performance has been established (Jung and Kim 2014). According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), in highly institutionalised circumstances, such as governments, an organisation's performance partially rests in its capacity to comprehend and adhere to evolving trends and, also, to undertake governmental reforms. Thus, before exploring the link between organisational structure and organisational performance, it is of utter importance to define which governmental sector this paper sets out to assess. Consequently, the next section lays out some of the major trends, disruptors or engines that have steered public administration into improving its administrative capacity and ensuing performance with regard to the realm of digitalisation.

2.2 Digitalisation as Disruptor to Governmental Structures?

Governance, as we know it today, witnesses the challenge of implementing new digital technologies, which by their very nature often re-enforce or even disrupt existing administrative structures, dismantle archaic assumptions, and elevate obsolete processes. Moreover, an increasing corpus of research in social science shows that the performance of public entities is impacted by governance structures (Heinrich and Lynn 2000, as cited

in Knott and Payne 2004). Although the issue of how structure affects the performance of public administrations has received considerable attention, there is a dearth of knowledge about how the structures of public entities responsible for coordinating digital capacities affect the performance or administrative capacity of such institutions.

On the one hand, since the early 2000s, many papers have gone above and beyond how Information and Communications Technology acceptance and use within public institutions have an impact on their structural design (Heintze and Bretschneider 2000). On the other hand, the issue of how structural configurations of public organisations affect their latter efficacy in the digitalisation endeavours has not been thoroughly tackled in the literature. This is why, as stipulated within the corpus of this thesis, this research strives to discover the underlying factors that guide administrative authorities into opting for certain structures for the institutions in charge of digitalisation.

In order to do this, one should commence from the above-mentioned argument that, despite extensive study on the topic of how PA deals with the digitalisation phenomenon, there is a paucity of information on how the structures of decision-making bodies in charge of coordinating digital capabilities affect the administrative capacity of specific institutions. Needless to say, the study of how or whether the structure of relevant institutions affects the decision-making processes of public organisations in terms of digitalisation is of paramount importance given the current interest in the subject. However, the core of this thesis is dictated by the epistemological attempt to discover whether there is a connection between this administrative capacity or perceived institutional performance in achieving digitalisation agendas and the endeavour of administrations to structurally reform their institutional bodies.

In order to delve deeper into this seemingly cursory topic, it is utterly important for one to anatomise and separate the various conceptual facets that public sector digitalisation brings together. Most commonly, as noted by Mergel et al. (2019), concepts such as eGovernment, eGovernance, digital administration, or digital transformation are employed in conjunction with one another, distorting what is meant by all these different notions. Moreover, Di Giulio and Vecchi (2021) emphasise that all these numerous concepts differ in how they affect the structural interconnections inside and across organisations, and thus, a thorough delineation is necessary for them to function effectively in their respective fields.

2.2.1.1 eGovernment

Odat (2012) offers a highly comprehensive definition of the notion of eGovernment. More specifically, he views it as the capacity of various governmental entities to deliver

services promptly and effectively to the public via electronic means, eliminating thus strenuous amounts of labour and time (Odat 2012). With the introduction of eGovernment, an associated demand for coordinated and integrated systems, accessibility, and interoperability structures at the governmental level has risen (Reddick 2010). However, the prerogatives of successful eGovernment are hard to achieve, and their performance might be oftentimes linked to the governmental structures in charge of digitalisation. Rexed (2008) noted that eGovernment should cease to be regarded as an independent topic but rather as a component of every facet of the modernisation of public administrations. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2005) underscores this assumption by contending that governments need to be prepared to operate from a whole-of-government viewpoint in order to unlock every opportunity of eGovernment.

However, authorities possess a long history of institutional autonomy and lack of collaboration when it comes to public entities in charge of digitalisation, and recent changes in government administration have additionally culminated in the decentralisation of the government sector (OECD 2005). Moreover, with the introduction of eGovernment, several nations have begun to reintegrate certain government procedures and redesign others. However, there is no such thing as a single approach that works for all situations when it comes to eGovernment coordination (OECD 2005). Given that the topic of decision-making with regard to institutional structure is highly controversial due to its increased contextuality, the specificities of the chosen case study serve as the climate of assessment within the scope of this thesis and will be depicted later within the dedicated subsequent chapter.

2.2.1.2 eGovernance

Although perceived by some as analogous to the concept of eGovernment, which therefore refers to the delivery of regular government data and operations via digital channels (Marche and McNiven 2003), eGovernance needs to be looked at and defined using a different lens. Therefore, eGovernance represents a collection of technologically assisted activities which are reshaping simultaneously the way government interacts with its constituents and how public services are delivered (Torres et al. 2005). This ensuing notion rather depicts a technology moderated interaction between people and their respective governments in terms of prospective digital debate regarding public communication and policy development (Marche and McNiven 2003). Basu (2004) sees eGovernance as a tool to complement all parties' efforts and aspirations for a more efficient administration, as new technologies have the ability to link all relevant stakeholders and facilitate activities and procedures.

2.2.1.3 Governmental Adaptation Strategies to Digital Transformation

According to Larsson and Teigland (2019), digitalisation has been the nominated umbrella term used to describe each of these happenings, while digital transition or digital transformation appear to be the prevalent buzzwords used to describe the manner by which governments adjust to these new realities in order to stay relevant and connected to an increasingly digital environment. Moreover, the same authors have claimed that governments must strive to operate consistently via a boosted reliance on horizontal structures, while concentrating on the real significance and intended use of the provided services (Larsson and Teigland 2019). Larsson and Teigland (2019) further describe these endeavours as adjustments to the novel circumstances generated by digitalisation within the climate of the democratic process.

According to Bannister and Connolly (2014), the notion of transformative government is interlinked with the rise of ICTs within the public sector, and therefore depicts the fact that, in their endeavours to adapt to new digital trends, the public administration's adaptation results in a shift in its previously established values, irrespective of the shape of the undertaken reform. Moreover, Braams et al. (2021) enhance this definition, by asserting that such a government is capable of embracing and swiftly carrying out the transitional responsibilities in a legitimate manner, while proactively integrating knowledge and paving the way for further transitions. Therefore, this approach to digital transformation underscores the idea that governments must show flexibility and openness when dealing with change, which could further pay back with faster adaptation to novel instances.

As put forward by Radnor (2010), an additional mechanism adopted by governments in their endeavour of adaptation to digital transformation is connected to the lean concept, which addresses the cutting down of what is usually coined as waste. Janssen and Estevez (2013) further strengthened Radnor's assessment, by asserting that the notion of lean government actually emerged in reaction to the established paradigms of eGovernment or transformative government, which have been previously assessed. Moreover, the latter authors contend that the main benefit of this second adaptive approach is that it simplifies the existing organisational structures and procedures (Janssen and Estevez 2013).

However, given the contextual needs that governments seek to address through the restructuring of administrative capacities associated with a horizontalization of structures or thorough adaptive government frameworks are not necessarily the ones that are envisioned or pursued by every public organisation. Additionally, each government's approach to digitalisation is distinct, and therefore this topic is delved into more thoroughly within one of the subsequent chapters of this thesis, with a focus on the

Romanian approach. However, further research on the potential rationales of governments to pursue various reform endeavours connected to the topic of digital transformation is necessary.

Nevertheless, scholars have accomplished considerable progress in connecting issues of institutional authority and organisational transformation or reorganisation to the issues of digitalisation or eGovernance (Schou and Hjelholt 2018). Moreover, Schou and Hjelholt (2018) emphasise the example of Fountain's (2014, as cited in Schou and Hjelholt 2018) research, which underlines the manners by which structures both enable and restrict the application of digital technology, based on institutional theory. Consequently, there are numerous theoretical lenses through which the issue of connecting governmental structures and their reorganisation in congruence with their digitalisation endeavours is tackled. However, before diving into potential theoretical frameworks that explain the dynamics of organisational reconfiguration, a rigorous definition of the notion of reform, as the main concept at the crux of this thesis, should be handled first.

2.3 Institutional Reform

In connection to the aforementioned, it is worth underscoring that public administration reforms are frequently linked to ineffectiveness and disregarded commitments on behalf of public institutions (Toonen 2013). According to Alesina et al. (2006), administrative reforms are typically used to describe a significant shift which transcends regular policy administration. Khemani (2017) emphasises that economists also view PA reformation as a modification of organisational norms or governmental policies, due to the fact that the current structures and procedures are considered to not operate effectively. However, while some reforms strive to achieve somehow an equilibrium between various factors, such as when a shift aims at reducing a deficit in a specific governmental dimension (Alesina et al. 2006), others include fundamental changes, such as transforming the entire governmental structure as it was previously known.

Nevertheless, attempts have already been made by various national administrative structures worldwide to assess and even reform their services and capacity distributions, with the enhancement of the performance of government generally being the main objective of these initiatives (Moynihan 2013). However, it is common knowledge that one of the main challenges facing every democracy is figuring out how to design their political-administrative structures in a manner that supports both the ideals of their leadership, as well as the aspirations of the society at large. For instance, decentralisation is now seen as an approach that can be applied to a number of distinct nationwide circumstances in numerous countries (Hutchcroft 2001), as it deconcentrates and distributes power between various actors and boosts transparency.

Regardless of the benefits of various structural reform methods, the type of reforming approach adopted by each administrative body is highly contextual, as it is intrinsically linked to the need one strives to cover in one's aim to boost performance – be it in the overall dimension of governance or in the governance of a specific administrative field. Therefore, studying the instances of a particular case proves to be the appropriate means to approach the underlying factors causing reform. This is why a political setting's analysis should be pursued before delving into the highly complex realities of reform. However, in the case of this thesis, this is pursued within the case study chapter.

Therefore, one could contend that the most obvious characteristic of reform in the institutional sector is structural and organisational transformation. In broad terms, institutional reforms can thus potentially include a component on restructuring, with emphasis on creating or eliminating organisations or portions of them, centralising and decentralising administrative control over organisations, or merging and separating organisations (Van De Walle and Groeneveld 2016). Moreover, in institutions such as governments, the urge to shrink, simplify, or integrate structures in order to better reflect novel policy goals or viewpoints on both societal and administrative concerns is frequently present (Van De Walle and Groeneveld 2016).

In sum, reforms primarily consist of bettering or improving (Toonen 2013). A first inference that may be drawn through the lens of this sub-chapter is that public administration reforms reflect, in one way or another, a type of restructuring, be it human-resource, legal, or policy-related, which tries to enhance a certain – or multiple – aspects of governance. However, the cause that leads to the need for governments to restructure any of the above-mentioned domains can be an important indicator of various theoretical frameworks rooted in or deduced from the variety of reforms' typologies taking place in the realm of public administration, which will be dealt with later within the corpus of this section.

2.3.1 Veto Players within Reform Instances

The essential goal of the government is to resolve issues. It is common knowledge that governments often carry out reform initiatives (Montjoy and O'Toole 1979; Calista 1986; Denis and Forest 2012, as cited in Cloutier et al. 2016). For it to accomplish this, governments must make decisions. By analogous logic, governance is just an endless cycle of decision-making (Newton and Deth 2009a). However, a decision is not a straightforward, singular occurrence but rather the outcome of a mechanism that typically takes a long time (Simon 1965). Owing to the fact that they define the main trajectories, magnitude and execution of any reform within the public administration realm, the decision-making processes are essential to the achievement of any objective. It is

therefore important to examine how the reform-related decisions are made when it comes to the governmental changes, by thus stressing important variables and points of discussions that have been previously underscored in specialised literature.

Therefore, every state's constitution, as a fundamental collection of regulations that sets the contours of the national political system (Newton and Deth 2009b), specifies the specific arrangement of its institutions and defines the pool of administrative functions at every organisational level. Typically, this refers to the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, in addition to occasionally lower layers of administration. In many noteworthy organisations, there is an individual or group of individuals in charge of making the final decisions, establishing regulations, and assuming decisive accountability (Newton and Deth 2009b).

2.3.1.1 Overview of Roles

According to Newton and Deth (2009b), the executive arm, which sits at the highest level of the political system, carries out several essential operations. First and foremost, the people within a governmental institution are the ones responsible for decision-making, for the launch of initiatives and development of public policy (Newton and Deth 2009b). Furthermore, they are the ones responsible for organising and integrating intricate governmental processes and operations (Newton and Deth 2009b). Therefore, the main pylon standing at the foundational depths of decision-making is represented by the governmental bodies, in all their complexity.

Executives are required to take part in any endeavours related to influencing existing or current policies (Cloutier et al. 2016). Therefore, diverse viewpoints on the function of organisational leadership in these attempts have also been adopted in the research on the execution of reform. Initial investigations, known as the top-down perspective, focused on determining the conditions under which proposed reforms were carried out as intended (Montjoy and O'Toole 1979; Pressman and Wildavsky 1979; Sabatier and Mazmanian 1980; Van Meter and Van Horn 1975, as cited in Cloutier et al. 2016). According to this approach (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975; Sabatier and Mazmanian 1980, as cited in Cloutier et al. 2016), executives were supposed to serve as direct agents of transformation. However, both top-down and bottom-up approaches will later be dealt with within the scope of this section.

Despite this significant conceptual delineation of roles, additional research is still required to understand the manner in which the executives, entrusted with carrying out reform, control the difficulties transformation brings while proactively establishing their organisations within an emerging policy environment. The function that these individuals

perform, according to Cloutier et al. (2016), is crucial in defining the types and degrees of adjustment that are implemented in practice. Moreover, it is of utmost importance to understand that political systems vary greatly in a number of ways. By developing various classifications of different state facets, political science researchers have addressed these disparities. For instance, as previously underscored, the stakes of various forms of government, such as presidential, semi-presidential, or parliamentary, should be taken into consideration when addressing who are the key veto players with regard to governmental structural reform.

2.3.1.2 Decision-Making across Governmental Instances

In essence, Tsebelis (1995, 2000) portrays a veto player as the individual political figure or decision-makers' group whose consent is necessary for changing the current status quo. Furthermore, the universal quality of a veto player is given by the requirement of his agreement before any change in the status quo is achieved (Tsebelis 2000). On the one hand, such participants in presidential systems include the legislative branch (Tsebelis 2000). On the other hand, according to parliamentary frameworks, the Parliament appoints the executive and one or more groups must come to an agreement (Tsebelis 2000).

However, the situation changes under semi-presidential regimes. According to Duverger (1980 p. 166, as cited in Elgie 2004, p. 316):

“A political regime is considered as semi-presidential if the constitution which established it combines three elements: (1) the president of the republic is elected by universal suffrage, (2) he possesses quite considerable powers; (3) he has opposite him, however, a prime minister and ministers who possess executive and governmental power and can stay in office only if the parliament does not show its opposition to them.”

Executive authority is therefore distributed between the president and the prime minister (Newton and Deth 2012c). However, Elgie (2004) argues that these descriptions of semi-presidential regimes are insufficient or inadequate, as they need assessment of a president's actual or potential authority. By this reasoning, a more suitable and simpler definition is provided by capturing the semi-presidential regime as one in which a president who was chosen by the people and has a definite term coexists with a prime minister and cabinet who answer to the legislative (Elgie, 1999, as cited in Elgie 2004).

Therefore, it could be universally argued that governments are not always synchronised, or seamless systems; rather, governments are divided into several competing, overlapping, and uncoordinated departments and components. According to Newton and

Deth (2009a), the means through which the public sector entities could create some sort of a joined-up governance, where government decisions are essentially cohesive and drive steers in an approximately identical direction, is one of the major challenges facing the expansive infrastructure of the contemporary state. However, the latter authors further contend that sometimes this aim could prove to be unattainable, as third parties, lobbying organisations, international institutions, media outlets, or even people pertaining to the same governmental realm may have distinct views in relation to decisions (Newton and Deth 2009a).

Given the fact that the specific key stakeholders and political actors may vary from one country to another, the core of decision-making distribution in terms of reform implementation can be perceived through policy processes. Therefore, it essentially all comes down to breaking Newton and Deth's policy cycle (2009a). As shown in the figure below, the authors have identified six stages to the policy cycle. Subsequently, (Newton and Deth (2009a) have asserted that the entire procedure should be imagined as a perpetual and never-ending cycle rather than as a single-directional motion, having an individual start and completion.

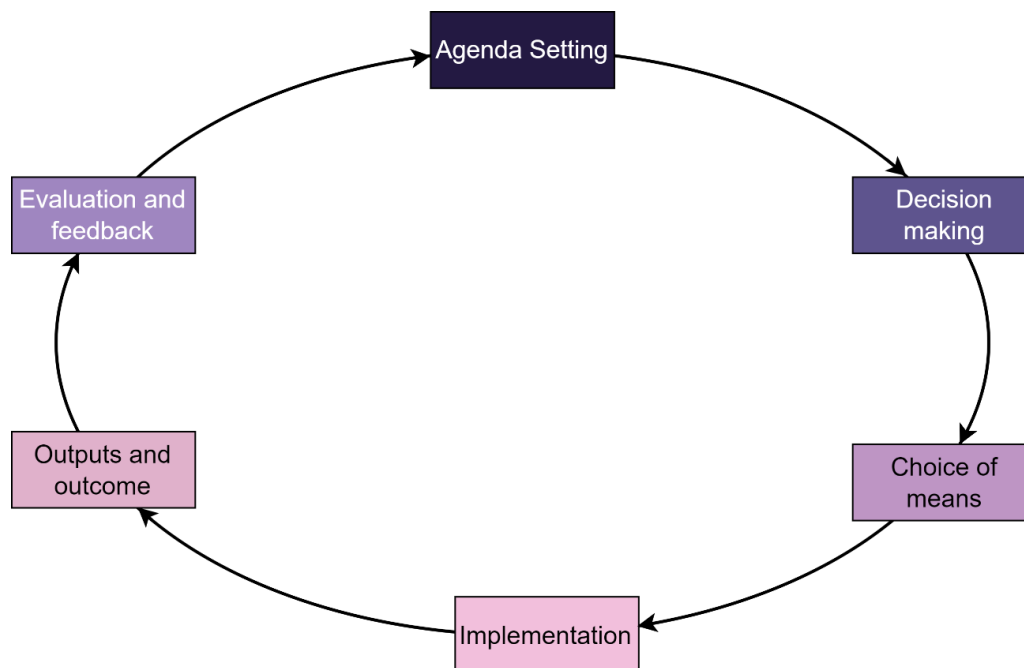


Figure 1. Policy Cycle, reproduced from Newton and Deth (2009a)

Therefore, instead of portraying a singular array of non-mutable stakeholders, this cycle could additionally inform one in choosing the appropriate stakeholders or institutions for the case study analysis. As governments are complex institutions, and their context is volatile from one nation to another, it is virtually impossible to identify and denominate universal actors in charge of each of these steps. The only macro-delineation one could

do with regard to the type of veto players directly implicated in the reform process is that in accordance with the type of the form of government, which has already been undertaken within the boundaries of this chapter.

2.3.1.3 The Debate over Coordination

However, without overstepping into the micro level of analysis of various stakeholders in charge of decision-making, it is important to acknowledge that government reform initiatives that take place inside a functional performance management framework have a higher chance of success (Moynihan 2013). However, within the case study's setting arrangements, there is an absence of comprehending the significance of public management, as well as little interest for developing capabilities that could enhance efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of state services (Hințea 2020).

While governments are trying to improve public management coordination, this requires an extensive amount of effort and resources, as their institutions possess a variety of tools at their command (Peters 2018). However, the latter author asserts that neither of the existing processes provide an instant solution, given that reform takes time to be implemented, and the governmental apparatus is made up of humans who have to adapt to the new settings (Peters 2018). Certain systems of coordination rely primarily on top-down types of coordination, whereas other ones could be heavily dependent on negotiations amongst the various individuals implicated within the reform procedures (Peters 2018).

Moreover, public policy reform investigations frequently contrast top-down and bottom-up methodologies in order to clarify how reforms are implemented (Matland 1995, as cited in Cloutier et al. 2016), particularly through determining the elements that lead to unsuccessful reform. The inability to perform administrative reform is frequently blamed on the top-down approach or on elements including inadequate strategies or deficient collaborations (Jewell and Glaser 2006; May and Winter 2009, as cited in Cloutier et al. 2016), which take one back to Moynihan's (2013) argument that reform necessitates a viable framework for public management performance.

However, from the perspective of the bottom-up approach (Lipsky 1980, 2010, as cited in Cloutier et al. 2016), reform struggles are frequently credited to the subjective autonomy of the leader-executives who, due to superior operating knowledge or lack of resources, figure techniques for avoiding implementing adjustments which do not meet their own requirements or demands (Matland 1995; Moore 1987, as cited in Cloutier et al. 2016). Therefore, an additional challenge for governmental reform is coordination. This is because administrations consist of multiple entities performing various services

or offering a comparable service in multiple formats (Bouckaert et al. 2010). However, since the ideal context of having a perfectly established order is hard to turn to life, one must consider methods to coordinate initiatives once they have been approved (Peters 2018). Essentially, policy coordination refers to the instance in which, whenever deciding on specific governmental actions, institutions subsequently evaluate other decisions or initiatives adopted by other governmental entities, in an effort to resolve any potential conflicts that might arise from not achieving a common ground between existing and prospective actions (Peters 2018).

Initiatives for enhancing cohesiveness have been established starting mid-90s (Verhoest et al. 2007). For topics like eGovernment or coordination, government officials prioritised collaborative endeavours built on both internal and external networking (Niklasson, 2004, as cited in Verhoest et al. 2007). Such collaborative networks function as a vehicle for coordination. This type of endeavour nevertheless improves existing policy mechanisms (Peters 2018). Therefore, within their specific studies, scholars have agreed that internalising external knowledge provided by the wider market proves to enhance existing gaps in governmental policy coordination across various fields.

It goes without saying that, above all, governments need structure in order to tackle coordinating issues. As to return to the previous dimension, – that of decision-making at governmental level – Staw, Sandelands, and Dutton (1981, as cited in Wynen et al. 2016) contend there exists a propensity to delegate this decision-making to a select few of executives within the organisational layers since transformational climates, such as reforms, require rapid responses and undermine the legitimacy and credibility of the organisation's authority. This is why a demand for more centralised hierarchical control emerged, leading to an increase in the level of centralised oversight of agencies or the centralisation of coordinating authority for eGovernment, EU policy, and public administration reform (Verhoest et al. 2007).

The issues of centralisation and decentralisation are highly interconnected with the hierarchical dimensions of institutions. As previously underscored, attempts to achieve coordination often include central institutions, which are entities that assist and oversee hierarchically lower-positioned bodies and are tasked with leveraging budgetary constraints and exerting authority over legislation as to adhere to the policies of the current administration (Peters 2018). Moreover, even if it might not fall under these organisations' primary duty, coordination is unquestionably a crucial activity (Peters 2018). However, according to Molander et al. (2002, as cited in Verhoest et al. 2007), small-scale ministries still lack the ability to direct the various organisations strategically,

which enhances the need for central control and overall convergence (Verhoest et al. 2007).

In contrast, the disaggregation or decentralisation reforms, which have previously been noted as a common reforming pattern, additionally present their own set of difficulties and problems. Therefore, one assessment that needs to be made is that, according to Smoke (2015), it oftentimes might be challenging to adjust institutional structures that were developed in particular circumstances, just to fulfil the established standards of decentralisation. Moreover, the latter scholar asserts that considerably more focus has been placed on planning decentralisation properly and in accordance with established standards, tailored to a particular environment, rather than on the considerably greater complex work of putting it into practice (Smoke 2015).

In addition to all the above and considering the perspectives of both government administration and public policy scholarly literature, the assessment of public sector reforms constitutes the least developed topic of discussion among all the organisational and public sector theories (Toonen 2013). Therefore, there is a dearth of scientific background which could guide the policymakers in completely enhancing and coordinating their prospective reform endeavours. This consequently calls for a review of some of the most prominent theoretical frameworks depicted in the existing literature, in order to better grasp some of the influences, causes and motivations that lead decision-makers into opting for governmental reformation.

2.4 Theoretical Frameworks behind Institutional Reforms

The discourse of researchers in the realm of administrative reform literature tends to be “*atheoretical*” (Van De Walle and Groeneveld 2016, p. 3). Therefore, the literature review of this domain leads one back to the debates over the structural arrangements of institutions – a time-honoured theme of discussion. Structural notions have been the subject of dialogue among numerous thinkers, intellectuals, and scholars since ancient times. For instance, numerous thinkers in support of the decentralisation movements emerged from the Enlightenment, in the 17th, respectively the 18th centuries, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Montesquieu (Bibby 2016). Moreover, the 19th century brought both Karl Marx, a political theorist primarily recognised for his communist views and his inclination towards centralisation (Zarembka 2021).

Exploring the underlying dynamics and structures of convoluted organisations poses one of the many intriguing research challenges (Hsu et al. 1983) that researchers in social science experience even in the current days. In order to overcome these limitations, examining how power and decision-making are shifted within the context of

organisational structures reform has received more and more attention in political literature over the past century.

Throughout the literature review process, it was observed that the scholars who dealt with mapping the empirical components for the assessment of organisational structure reforms and power distribution in the mid-20th century were heavily influenced by the Weberian views regarding bureaucratic authority. Within this theme of discourse, the academics of the second half of the past century had placed an increasing amount of attention to the structural variables that could be derived from Weber's notions and how they could be operationalised within real contexts. Although foundational for the sociological investigative realm of organisational structures, Max Weber's concepts and theories are also defined as ideal, which often creates numerous challenges to the researcher (Glencoe 1947, as cited in Pugh et al. 1963).

During more recent years, political science has started placing a strong emphasis on institutional theory. Despite the fact that the political studies approach of historical institutionalism frequently focuses on studies of crucial historical shifts, some of the discipline's most prominent academics (Pierson 2003, 2004; Streeck and Thelen 2005; Thelen 2003, as cited in Kickert and van der Meer 2011) have established intriguing and practical patterns concerning progressive, gradual alterations. The focus is most commonly placed on various governmental institutions, as well as the ways in which they affect governmental players and shape their priorities (Lepsius 2016).

Although the idea of an institution plainly implies steadiness and structure, organisations fluctuate throughout time. And oftentimes, institutional structures could shift their existing frameworks due to internal as well as external causes. For instance, Scott (2008) contends that external shifts can arise from variations in larger or adjacent structures, particularly for political or economic causes, which could therefore alter current conceptions. Moreover, he underscores that drivers that introduce novel institutional structures frequently infiltrate various domains by migrating them from other environments (Scott 2008). This could be furthermore exemplified with, for instance, influences or pressures from EU overseeing bodies directed towards Member States as to reform in order to enhance current practices and align with EU desiderates.

In connection with these ideas of institutional theory comes again the concept of legitimacy. From the standpoint of institutional theory, Crowson and Deal (2020) claim that a crucial aspect of organisational reform assessment could be a focus on the notion of legitimacy as a major distinguishing factor. In the setting of reforms, legitimacy is viewed as a question of internally enhancing an institution's capacity as a first move to entice potential outer stakeholders (Bennett and Hansel 2006, as cited in Crowson and

Deal 2020). Overall, all organisations are built on the administration of power, authority and legitimacy enhancement, where control is usually arranged hierarchically (Mansfield 1973). However, reforming a portion of the decision-making process within the structures of administrative organisations is a significant means by which the leadership could legitimise and distribute authority over the institution's operations (Mansfield 1973) and fields of specialisation.

According to further study, as organisations adapt formal norms and structures in anticipation of external institutional influences, modifications that first appear minor gradually grow into being increasingly substantial. In light of this, Edelman (1992, as cited in Scott 2008) contends that structure and function have been separated as different variables. Structures can sometimes take the place of fundamental or procedural shifts, while they can also subtly transform duties and identities to the point where officials turn into inner reformers when it comes to operational and structural reforms (Edelman 1992, as cited in Scott 2008). Actually, bringing in or consolidating a completely new set of players who are skilled in handling these problems is one of the most typical responses of organisations to outside influences (Scott 2008). However, the way in which governmental institutions can be reformed and controlled top down and through a technocratic manner is one that new institutionalism views as rather challenging, or even problematic (Thoenig 2013). This is because there are issues with how top-down modifications relate to reforms' results, and, in a contradictory way, while they promote stability, they also impede transformation (Thoenig 2013).

This gives rise to a plethora of other axioms and theories underlying and legitimising reforms. As Thoenig (2013) contends, New Public Management (NPM) reforms are predicated on broadly recognised claims drawn from the field of economics, such as rational decision-making and agency theory, and other fields that are purportedly broadly applicable. A theory known as contextualism, which maintains that politics is a part of society which can oftentimes drive reform as merely the result of socioeconomic status and historical tradition, promotes a strategy that considers the particular circumstance of each governmental framework in the broader context of administrative reform and customises changes to national requirements and problems (Thoenig 2013). Therefore, contextualism encourages a knowledgeable and adaptable strategy for administrative reform, taking thus into account the variety and multifaceted nature of administrative structures.

According to the reductionist theory, on the other hand, political processes can be viewed as the results of specific behavioural patterns (March and Olsen 1984; Meyer 2008; Thoenig 2013; Willmott 2015). For example, how a government organisation operates

may be explained by the behaviour representation of just one of its most prominent officials (Thoenig 2013). Additionally, it could be asserted that this type of theoretical framework proposes a more straightforward and systematic method for comprehending the intricacies of reforms in comparison to the contextualist perspective. In a somewhat similar line of argumentation, but in congruence with the economic utilitarian way of thinking, individuals are believed to only choose organisational structures that meet contextual needs (Thoenig 2013) and eliminate those which fail in doing so. Moreover, if one moves further to a more instrumental approach, allocating resources is the primary function of the political process, and it thus seems acceptable to explain the reforms undergone by governments when performing budgeting reforms (Thoenig 2013).

2.4.1 The Transformative Perspective

As Van De Walle and Groeneveld (2016) argue in their book, there are several angles from which individuals might view, recognise, and evaluate the nature of public sector advancements. Besides the institutional perspective, which has been already delineated and which is the first one to be described in depth by Van de Walle and Groeneveld, Christensen and Lægreid (2016) also draw inferences on the transformative perspective. The transformational approach, which centres on organisational theory, investigates how external or internalised circumstances, politics, and culture both limit and promote reforms in administrative processes (Christensen and Lægreid 2001, 2007; Christensen et al. 2009, as cited in Christensen and Lægreid 2016). Therefore, within this paradigm, it is essential to understand and assess the administrative and institutional fluctuations associated with reforms through an intricate combination of societal demand, institutional background, and political peculiarities.

The New Public Management wave of reforms that has been mentioned above is broadly categorised to be part of the spectrum of transformative paradigms. This is because, as NPM extended internationally and acquired a dominating ideological position (Christensen and Lægreid 2016; Meyer and Rowan 1977), this pressured many nations to implement comparable reforms and structural modifications (Christensen and Lægreid 2016; Dimaggio and Powell 1983). This mirrors another element which is used to describe one of the effects of external pressures within transformative reforms, which is coined as isomorphism. Isomorphism is an unavoidable and yet predictable phenomenon of an institution transforming its former means of organisation or structures under the influence of prevailing standards and beliefs (Christensen and Lægreid 2016).

Consequently, the transformational approach employs the assessment of three core elements when conducting research on reform. Therefore, these relate to the environmental pressure, cultural factors, and polity background variables (Christensen

and Læg Reid 2016). According to multiple scholars, these are among the key reasons as to why reform plans and executions vary throughout the globe (Christensen and Laeg Reid 2001; Pollitt, Van Thiel and Homburg 2007; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011, as cited in Van De Walle and Groeneveld 2016). Additionally, misunderstanding how all these notions interplay in the assessment of reforms may result in a generalised conception of public administration, which leads to the clash of different practical scenarios in the context of performing structural reform (Christensen and Lgreid 2007; Lgreid and Verhoest 2010; Olsen 2010, as cited in Van De Walle and Groeneveld 2016).

Since administrative changes that fail to consider the historical institutional setting often result in novel and never-ending adjustments as opposed to enhanced efficiency, it is crucial to properly match reforms in administration to the requirements, customs and capabilities of each polity framework (Olsen, 2006, as cited in Christensen and Læg Reid 2016). According to the authors' view, specific organisational frameworks and cultural norms have influenced how distinct conceptions or proposals for improvements in administration have been perceived and addressed (Laeg Reid and Verhoest 2010, as cited in Christensen and Læg Reid 2016). Moreover, the NPM-related breakthroughs have progressively lost some of their initial appeal in subsequent years. Instead, the sets of theories assessing the historical-institutional backgrounds of reform, as well as the Neo-Weberian state have been revived (Olsen 2006; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011, as cited in Christensen and Læg Reid 2016). This indicates that paying attention to the local organisational and administrative environment is of utmost importance in the context of organisational adjustments' analysis.

Therefore, a wide range of theories exist to address, clarify, and precisely depict the requirements, causes, and approaches through which governments choose to use different reform strategies. It is worth underlining that the primary emphasis of this very thesis concentrates on delimiting what all the rationales illustrated through these theoretical frameworks mean in the context of the digitalisation capacities migration within the institutional realm of the Romanian Government. These theories and philosophical perspectives strive to delineate the key elements which one needs to understand if one strives to comprehend the impact structure has on a social phenomenon and the needs that drive structural modifications. Having commenced from this delimitation, the thesis thus dissects the interplay between the nature of organisational structures and the causes for reform of digitalisation-related capacities.

3 Research Design and Methodology

As previously stated, structure is significant, but it is of exceptional contextuality. Consequently, the more contextual the research issue, the more robust and thorough the methodology should be, as uncovered during an exhaustive review of previous approaches and methods revealed within the existing literature. In light of the foregoing, a clear argumentation of each step that has been carried out in achieving this thesis' aim and objectives by means of methodological techniques and procedures has been laid out below. Additionally, this chapter includes both the research design and its constituent elements, such as the research perspective, approach, strategy, and time horizon. The final section of this chapter provides a comprehensive depiction of the data collection and analysis choices, supported by thorough evidence from the research literature.

3.1 Research Aim and Objectives

First, the aim and methodological objectives must be clearly laid out and delineated from one another. The objectives thus serve as individual stages of progress in achieving the aim, which is the ultimate purpose this paper sets out to achieve: obtaining an answer to the previously established RQ. Therefore, the thesis' core aim is to discover the underlying factors of the latest governmental structural reforms in the Romanian digital policy coordination context. Taking into account several vectors, including the recency of the Romanian reform movements under scrutiny, a purely literature-driven analysis of the Romanian Government and the procedures followed by it in terms of digitalisation practices would have been insufficient in order to achieve this intended target. Thus, there is a need for laying out the major empirical steps in the selection of a thorough methodological framework.

Consequently, the established objectives have been first concentrated on a clear definition and delineation of the conceptual framework and of the methodological dimension. Second, this thesis strives to construct a solid narrative of the case study at hand, by depicting the historical, political, and administrative peculiarities of the Romanian digitalisation climate. Third, to gather more relevant data about the main case at play, operationalising the pre-established variables of the transformative approach theory within a thorough set of interview questions related to the latest digitalisation reform movements has proven to be another essential step in the research process. Fourth, this thesis aimed at conducting semi-structured interviews with at least eight top Romanian stakeholders directly involved in the field of digital policymaking or policy coordination. Ultimately, one of the final objectives related to the thorough assessment of the collected

data and the construction of a rigorous discussions section, in which secondary aspects depicting the Romanian digitalisation climate are addressed.

3.2 Unfolding the Onion Approach

The red thread of the research narrative is supported by an extensive review of the literature and an assessment of the results derived from alternative data collection methods, such as interviews, that have proven effective in previous research studies focused on aspects congruent to my topic. As previously pointed out by Gunderson and Holling (2002), defining a specific situation acts as a first crucial step in developing an exploratory scenario. When the researcher establishes a clearly unambiguous aim, one is able to continue to the subsequent phase within the research design process: defining the conceptual building blocks and outlining the theoretical framework (Abutabenjeh and Jaradat 2018).

Following this logic, the aforementioned blocks are the key conceptual theories and the core notions at play, which are the main elements of analysis, irrespective of the scenery (Gunderson and Holling 2002). Consequently, the numerous conceptual building blocks are then merged to produce a research architectural plan, constructing thus an embedded reasoning that would tie all the different pieces of assessment together into a unified research red thread. In the context of this thesis, the conceptual building blocks are therefore composed of the notions delineated within the *Conceptual Framework* section, related to the realm of public sector organisations and the dimensions of institutional reform.

Moreover, the red thread follows the aim to discover potential factors that led to the reconfiguration of attributions regarding digitalisation within the Romanian Government, namely the creation of the Authority for Digitalisation of Romania and the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation. Therefore, this thesis tries to penetrate behind the arguments already existing in the normative and scientific frameworks and discover the prevailing reasons and needs that led to these institutional changes.

Having started from this holistic architectural plan and having established the red thread of research, the ensuing steps need to be established, as to identify the methods of selection for the above-mentioned conceptual blocks. Numerous methods for developing research design are offered in an abundance of literature at this moment in time (Abutabenjeh and Jaradat 2018). However, due to the complexity of this topic and the exhaustive plethora of concepts that accompanies it, a thorough methodology that follows clear and precise steps needs to be provided. For this, Saunders et al. (2019) onion has been employed due to its illustrative power in terms of research design depiction.

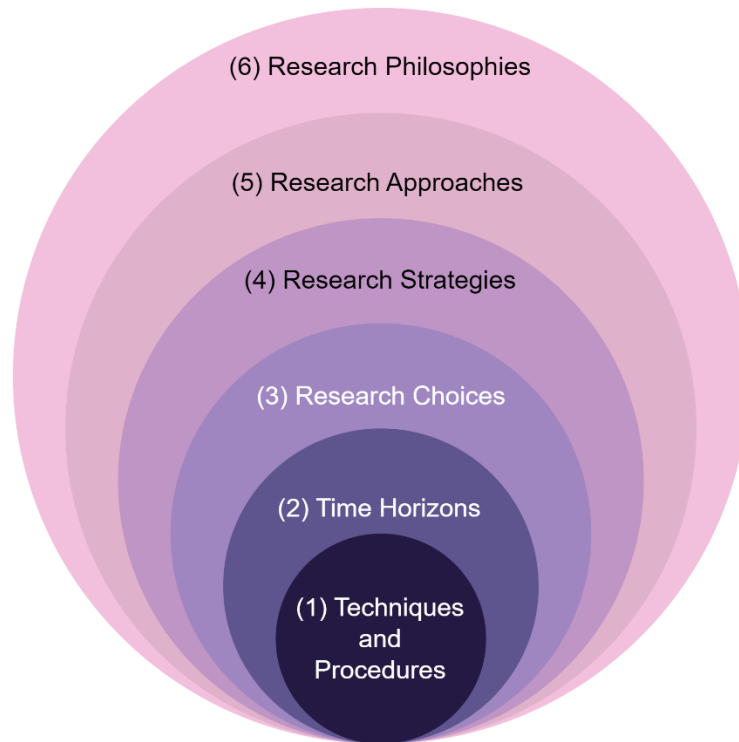


Figure 2. Research Onion Approach, reproduced from Saunders et al. (2019)

Following the previous logic, I will delve into unfolding the onion's layers commencing from the external ones to the very crux of the diagram, as to present a comprehensive view of the research philosophy that guides the red thread of this investigation. Thus, as explained by Saunders et al. (2019), choosing the right (6) *Philosophical Perspective* guarantees the proper selection of the subsequent design components and sets the environment for undertaking the ensuing research steps. Therefore, considering that the aim of this research is to generate novel and contextual insights into the topic of public administration structure, a naturalist philosophical perspective has been adopted. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), the interpretive constructionist perspective stipulates that people and groups perceive and comprehend the world through their own lenses, and meaning remains contextual. Therefore, concerns about strengthening the validity and reliability of the results via a thorough research methodological framework are crucial.

As this thesis ultimately sets out to comprehend the factors determining digitalisation-related power distributions within the Romanian governmental realm through both literature review and expert interviews, the grade of contextuality of this research is high. Constructionist research, as in the case of this thesis, seeks to explain events by finding factors that explain certain outcomes and the link between them (Spencer et al. 2020). Moreover, in interpretative constructionist research, the objective is to characterise occurrences, processes, or even institutional aspects from the perspective of those

involved, typically using qualitative techniques, in a way that accepts several potential truths and overlapping interpretations of reality (Rubin and Rubin 2012). Therefore, the use of interviews as a data collection method is supported by the chosen philosophy. Consequently, this thesis is directed by a pre-existing theoretical foundation about how elements are connected, in order to offer a solid basis for the various interpretations of the interviewees. Moreover, the rigorousness of the methodological processes depicted within this section informs on the reliability of the investigations' conclusions.

The fourth layer of the research onion evokes the (5) *Research Approach*, which entails, in the case of this study, a transformative approach to the institutional reasoning, which corresponds to constructivist ideas. As previously highlighted within the *Conceptual Framework* chapter, reforms are multifaceted, complex and reflect diverse, competing structures that reconcile multiple motivations, principles, and relationships of power (Olsen 2010, as cited in Christensen and Læg Reid 2016). The assessment of a noteworthy occurrence, such as an institutional reform, therefore, calls for a deductive approach, which entails deriving ideas according to a chosen theory and going from the wider to the narrower dimensions (Locke 2007; Nola and Sankey 2007, as cited in Woiceshyn and Daellenbach 2018).

Moreover, strong instruments for deductive analysis, capable of understanding this sort of dynamics, are required in order to assess convoluted and hybrid reforms, such as in the case of Romania. Therefore, organisational theory, which includes operational and institutional components, constitutes one important conceptual framework (Peters 2012, as cited in Christensen and Læg Reid 2016; Olsen 2016). Based on such a foundation, a transformational approach explores the ways in which environmental pressures, polity, and cultural variables both impede and facilitate effective and purposeful administrative reform procedures and designs (Christensen and Laeg Reid 2001, 2007; Christensen et al. 2009, as cited in Christensen and Læg Reid 2016).

In addition, Christensen and Læg Reid (2016) argue that it is crucial to include such contextual elements while evaluating institutional reconfigurations. This is because, as Pollitt (2004, as cited in Christensen and Læg Reid 2016) asserted that there is no optimal model that can account for reform procedures and outcomes globally. Consequently, the authors' collection of contextual elements therefore incorporates the aforementioned administrative, cultural, and environmental variables (Christensen and Læg Reid 2016). This is because these components specify the autonomy or limitations that political and executive officials have when deciding to support as well as carry out structural institutional transformations, or reforms.

Moreover, March and Olsen (1984) have also addressed the impacts of environmental pressure when it comes to the assessment of the underlying motivations for reform. Meyer and Rowan (1977) consequently underscore the importance of these pressures, as institutions that operate in extremely complex settings and are successful in growing “*isomorphic*” (Meyer and Rowan 1977, p. 352) to their surroundings receive the legitimacy and capital necessary for survival (Meyer and Rowan 1977). In addition, the latter authors contend that this can be dependent on environmental dynamics or the institutional management’s capacity to influence such pressures (Hirsch 1975, as cited in Meyer and Rowan 1977). In sum, the environmental pressures partially revolve around a certain organisation’s capacity to adhere to and gain acceptance from other higher positioned actors within the setting. Therefore, a compliance to these external climates is necessary in institutionally complex situations, because effective advancement of public domains calls for knowledge of evolving trends and novel political initiatives or agendas (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Christensen and Lægreid (2016), however, argue that, in some circumstances, the leadership has the capacity to not only manage, but also influence reforms. In such cases, the authors distinguish between external forces and constraints that may originate from the technical ecosystem (Christensen and Lægreid 2016). According to Christensen and Lægreid (2016) and Meyer and Rowan (1977), technical pressures are the ones which refer to the tension that external trends apply to nations and public institutions to behave in a way that is assumed to be the right thing to do. Therefore, Christensen and Lægreid (2016) assert that, in comparison to broader institutional pressures, the ones stemming from the technical environment consist of a hard-core operational environment relating to rather technological elements, social and economic circumstances, which furthermore include the demands of markets. The institutional setting, on the other hand, deals with the globalisation of ideas and prevailing norms within the wider society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Moreover, another perspective of the transformative approach places the cultural factors as a key variable to how reform is being rationalised, conducted, and implemented. As previously addressed within the *Conceptual Framework* chapter, Kickert and van der Meer (2011) have contended that this approach favours intrinsic patterns and beliefs above external pressure, and as a result, it seeks to forecast incremental reforms (Christensen and Lægreid 2016), such as in the case of the chosen instances under scrutiny. Therefore, although the cultural variable is most prominently known for its capacity to test the compatibility of reform with the reformed setting (Christensen and Lægreid 2016), this factor is also employed within the scope of this assessment. This is done with a view to discover whether certain institutional cultural vectors or the

underlying organisational values imprinted in the procedures of Romanian institutions have had an impact on the reform-related decision-making.

Christensen and Lægreid (2016) consequently address the way in which institutional frameworks and political-administrative systems are another means by which nations distinguish themselves from one another. Furthermore, the authors contended that these elements may be used to describe the manner in which various nations approach reform initiatives (Weaver and Rockman 1993; Olsen and Peters 1996, as cited in Christensen and Lægreid 2016), which is why the polity factors will also be employed within the scope of this research. This is because a nation's ability to embrace and carry out reforms could be influenced by its primary polity characteristics (Christensen, 2003, as cited in Christensen and Lægreid 2016).

This transformative approach was selected because, despite the fact that national-based reforms have distinctive characteristics, they nevertheless draw inspiration from worldwide developments (Christensen and Lægreid 2016). Consequently, this theoretical framework involves more than just mixing and integrating numerous points of view, as the authors contend that it also takes into account meaning behind reformation movements (Christensen and Lægreid 2016). Although structural, cultural, and environmental factors narrow such reforms, reforms can additionally serve in influencing these variables in return (Christensen and Lægreid 2016). However, the way in which these intrinsic features could be or have been influenced in the case of Romanian executive institutions, as addressed within the expert interviews, will only later be addressed within the *Discussions* chapter.

Given their relevance on depicting the major causes for institutional reform, both the variables delineating technical and institutional pressures are employed and operationalised within the interview guide, as seen in section E of the Appendices, as to grasp the main causes of all the institutional rearrangements in the field of Romanian public sector digitalisation capacities. Consequently, it goes without saying that the pressures emanating from both environments could prove to be stronger or weaker, which therefore result in a myriad of different reform-adoption outcomes for the impacted institutions (Christensen and Lægreid 2016). However, the multifaceted instances of these results are addressed thoroughly within the *Results* chapter.

Another layer of Saunders' et al. (2019) onion elaborates on the (4) *Research Strategy* that guides the analysis of qualitative data, as the case of this very study. In this case, this strategy unfolds by following a single case study approach, as one of the most prominent research strategies in public administration (Kelman 2005, as cited in Van der Voet, 2014). As contended by Yin (2017), the case study methodology might turn particularly

useful when the borders between the event and its contextual causes are unclear. Therefore, this research strategy serves as the ideal alternative for a complex and highly vast setting, such as the Romanian one. Thus, applying a conceptual framework on the case of Romania and validating it via interviews with experts seems like the viable choice in order to put forward proper recommendations and to foresee potential trends in terms of methodological rigour and preciseness.

Moreover, Stake (1995, as cited in Simons 2020), makes a distinction across three types of case studies – intrinsic, instrumental, collective – impacting thus the technique used to collect data in each of these three categories. However, this thesis aims to expand on intrinsic discoveries. Therefore, the intrinsic dimension of investigation targets discovering the peculiarities of the individual case of Romania, with its specific motivations and stimuli that urged the structural reform of its ministries. Nonetheless, this thesis follows the steps and guidelines outlined by Simons (2020) in establishing the specific methodological processes for developing *The Case of Romania* chapter. Determining the case's boundaries additionally becomes of utmost significance. For example, in the context of this thesis, the case is made up of the latest structural reconfiguration of digital capacities within the Romanian Government. However, an overview of specific polity and reform features, and of both the previous and current assessments on Romanian digital transformations are provided.

Using a policy as the case itself has an impact on the entire boundary-setting process. This is because it implies not only the legislative dimension, but also the human one, comprising the motivations of those who designed and then implemented the policy, the impact of the policy on those who have been affected by it, as well as the likelihood that there was a political milieu that had an influence on how it evolved and would therefore inevitably be included in the case study, via the interviews' dimension. This is due to the fact that it is challenging to completely grasp how a reform or the justifications for it were understood and applied without a knowledge of the beliefs and objectives behind the establishment of the reform in its original instance.

Second, the analytical units that aid in defining the case's parameters are helpful in making analysis smoother. The structural reforms in the Romanian government and the establishment of a specialised Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation with an Authority for Digitalisation under its command serve as the main case in this study. The various governmental policies, official decisions, and their underlying motivations as portrayed in either the documents or in the stakeholders' interviews serve as the unit of analysis. The emphasis is then on why the Romanian structural reform took place and the knowledge this can produce for structural reforms on digital capacities generically.

Therefore, despite the fact that thematic analysis would have proven suitable given the nature of the topic at hand, scholars contend that it lacks plenty of details about its steps and processes (Bryman 2012). Hence, a more rigorous and precise method for consequently analysing the interviews' data is that of coding analysis, an increasingly exploratory strategy to research. According to Bryman (2012), this method concentrates on finding codes within qualitative datasets from which implications and assessments of surrounding occurrences or phenomena are derived.

Saunders' et al. (2019) next layer sheds light on the (3) *Research Choices* employed in the elaboration of the research, more specifically on the type of data gathered and its usage. It is common knowledge that the decision-making in terms of selecting the proper research techniques is determined by the RQ, objectives, as well as by characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation. Thus, employing a mono-qualitative method was the suitable choice for the selected topic. This is due to the fact that, as aforementioned, the conceptual richness of the subject at play requires a clear delimitation, a precise definition and a sound operationalisation of the notions involved. A second reason behind this decision lies in the fact that the research is being based on a coding approach, which also focuses on interpreting patterns in qualitative datasets. As previously mentioned, one technique to ensure the empirical dimension of the study was to operationalise the general driving forces behind organisational structural transformation, as presented by Christensen and Læg Reid (2016) through coding the stakeholders' interviews. This was done in an effort to draw out findings that offer specific connections between the chosen elements of the framework.

Specific interview questions that have been previously validated with a small sample of participants have been prepared, based on the conceptual constructs and dimensions, in order to make sure that enough data relating to each variable is collected. In addition to the primary interview questions, follow-up inquiries or demands for elaboration have been used to investigate further into the respondents' experiences and viewpoints. After the interview data was transcribed and assessed, precise codes and sub-codes have been derived from the initial abstract constructs, as shown in the codebook attached to section H of the Appendices.

A further layer of the diagram is represented by the (2) *Time Horizon* dimension. According to Babbie (2010), longitudinal studies and cross-sectional studies are the two most prevalent categories of temporal dimensions within research. The selected dimension was that of the cross-sectional study, as it constitutes an observational approach which entails gathering data at one moment in time. However, in order to counter the potential limitations emerging from this approach, documentation and

literature data have been gathered around a vast investigation, with the aim to provide a glimpse to why Romanian organisations have performed reforms of structural nature as observed through multiple instances in time. Nevertheless, the interview-data has been collected at one point in time, given the time constraints of the thesis. Even so, cross-sectional studies could still receive recognition for their applicability in identifying correlations across variables (Babbie 2010), which renders this approach fitting in the context of the current research.

At the crux of the above diagram one can locate the (1) *Techniques and Procedures* dimension. Thus, the following sub-section provides specifics on data collection and data analysis.

3.3 Data Handling

3.3.1 Data Collection

As a first step when commencing the study procedure, researchers are typically demanded to have evaluated the pertinent literature, as to create a sound theoretical framework that could depict the topic's background in the grand scheme of things. Researchers can then defend their discoveries as a possible addition to the current body of information in comparison to earlier research. Although there are now numerous varieties of approaches, one of the most important features of a completely anchored and thorough research is how the data collection, classification, and analysis procedures are carried out synchronously and repeatedly, as to cover for any potential inconsistencies that might arise.

3.3.1.1 Literature Collection

Therefore, one must first begin with establishing what is occurring in the chosen situation and what data is being studied. Secondary data gathering was the first form of data collection employed for this first step of the research. On the one hand, a review of the literature covering the entirety of the background of institutional reform has been performed. For that, a number of papers and publications have been carefully examined. The literature employed in constructing the conceptual framework offered precise illustrations and insights into the phenomena of governmental change.

On the other hand, literature dedicated to the depiction of the whole Romanian public administrative background and reform context has been employed in the construction of the case study section. Thus, this second step of review included literature pertaining to the realm of scholarly articles, but also papers belonging to the field of grey literature that

helped in identifying each step of the reform (e.g., governmental documentation, policy briefs, annual reports, white papers).

As previously mentioned, the main goal of the literature review is to discover various key rationales that could potentially compose a framework for discovering the underlying motivations of the Romanian administrative reform regarding its digital transformation-related coordination capacities. The literature review has therefore been carried across four separate repositories using both identical and differently formulated queries in order to cover as many resources as possible. Google Scholar (Google Scholar n.d.), Web of Science (Clarivate n.d.), LIBISnet – Limo and Primo portals – (accessed via (KU Leuven n.d.) and via Tallinn University of Technology Library n.d.) were the selected cross-databases. Although the search query suffered modifications across the research, the main keywords that have been taken into account throughout the whole data collection processes have been: (*“government” OR “governance” OR “public administration” OR “administration”*) AND (*“organization” OR “organisation” OR “organizational” OR “organisational”*) AND (*“reform” OR “restructuring” OR “structure”*) AND (*“centralising” OR “centralizing” OR “decentralising” OR “decentralizing” OR “decentralized” OR “decentralised” OR “de-centralized” OR “de-centralised” OR “centralised” OR “centralized”*) AND (*“decision-making” OR “decision making” OR “decision” OR “policy-making” OR “policymaking” OR “policy planning”*)

By using this method of literature browsing, the publications that seemed to relate most to the topic at play have been selected by a critical review of their abstracts and a thorough assessment on whether they provide the information sought in order to develop the conceptual framework and to inform on research methodologies. Consequently, the papers’ scope and practical applicability for the data analysis has been based on pre-defined exclusion and inclusion metrics, mainly concerning specific content requirements. Additionally, any sources of content that have not been published via well-known or peer-reviewed streams of information have been removed from the assessment.

Moreover, once the reading process had started, the material had been arranged employing the conceptual categories found in the theoretical section and then separated into chapters and sub-chapters within a reference manager software, namely Mendeley (Elsevier n.d.). Inside the sub-chapters, the data and major insights obtained from the literature review was classified or referenced using notes and observations in the intermediate phases of research. However, these initial classifications and comments, solely based on the literature review, were only taking into account the findings of the earlier stages (Bryant 2020), which have been further developed into a thorough conceptual framework, as the one depicted within the previous chapter. Furthermore, the

findings of the process of literature review have served as the primary benchmark for comparison with the information acquired from the interviews.

Additionally, the detailed analysis of the Romanian setting helped in delving deeper into the narratives, governmental discourse, and widely accessible justifications for both the previous and most recent ministerial changes. In general, as Simons (2020) puts it, document analysis is helpful for determining what precedents could be there to serve as a starting point for obtaining more data.

3.3.1.2 Interviews Collection

As put by Brinkmann (2020), dialogue is likely to have been employed to generate knowledge from the dawn of speech and cognition. Therefore, this sheds light on a second method employed for collecting additional data, represented by the conduction of interviews. Moreover, Brinkmann (2020) asserts that, in the case of interviews, it is not advisable to eliminate structure totally. Acknowledging the above-mentioned information and the fact that numerous facets of discussions might arise during the scrutiny of such a complex topic like governmental reform, a semi-structured approach has been adopted. Semi-structured interviews are by far the most prevalent kind of interview (Flick 2002, as cited in Brinkmann 2020; Bryman 2012; Rubin and Rubin 2012), as they maximise the potential of dialogues to generate new knowledge (Brinkmann 2020). Moreover, this type of interviewing is beneficial for immersing participants in the research endeavour, while encouraging them to share their experiences or contemplate on certain concerns (Simons 2020).

It is common knowledge that conducting interviews remains a time-intensive strategy. All steps – from planning the procedures and arrangements for organising meetings to carrying out the interviews per se – take a lot of effort and time to complete. Moreover, selecting the right sample proves to be a difficult issue for multiple researchers (Bryman 2012). Therefore, when it comes to sample size, the purposive sampling strategy described by Bryman (2012) has been employed. Snowball sampling is a method of respondents' recruitment in which first a restricted number of individuals whose backgrounds are useful to the research inquiries are selected, and those selected individuals then indicate additional respondents that possess the appropriate background information or expertise (Bryman 2012). Consequently, this approach aided in attracting novel interview subjects, as the topic piqued the interest of their formerly interviewed acquaintances, which then put forward the suggestion of participating to other relevant stakeholders. This method has proven to be effective, given both the accessibility as well as availability of subjects, which may prove laborious to manage, particularly when interacting with busy or notable stakeholders, as in the case of this study.

An additional reason behind this choice stems from the fact that no other type of sampling would have been realistically achievable within the given timeframe and with the given pool of potential interviewees. This is because the number of experts within both the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation and the Authority of Digitalisation of Romania is high. As portrayed within the two organigrams retrieved in sections A and B of the Appendices, the ministry consists of a total number of 188 positions, excluding dignitaries and the positions related to dignitaries' offices, as per the latest data publicly available (Romanian Government 2021a). Moreover, the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania consists of 285 positions, excluding dignitaries and the positions related to dignitaries' offices (Romanian Government 2023). As a result, selecting a proportional sample from a group of around 473 stakeholders would have been a challenging and unattainable assignment given the temporal premises of this thesis. The objective was to strategically select respondents such that they are directly related to the research questions under assessment. However, to guarantee that the final sample has a considerable degree of variation (Bryman 2012), participants vary from one another in terms of former or current positions and public sector related experience.

As asserted by Hill and Lynn (2019), choosing among various paths of action – such as in the context of reform – falls under the responsibility of the realm of policymaking, which would have made leading executives a principal target for the interviewees. However, given the exhaustive procedures needed to be undertaken in order to conduct interviews with higher state dignitaries, attempting to collect merely respondents who fell under this category would have been unattainable. Therefore, the area of individuals targeted within this dissertation comprised of a pool of expert stakeholders: former executives in leading positions, former/current cabinet advisers, former/current secretaries of state, former/current members of the Deputy Chamber, who engaged with or who have directly coordinated various endeavours of both the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation, the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, and other institutional precursors of digitalisation within the Romanian governmental setting.

The interviewed stakeholders have an essential part in establishing and executing policies, thus having had, at several points in time, an influence on the issue under examination. Connecting with the aforementioned experts aided in the provision of significant understanding into the decision-making procedures, policy viewpoints, and underlying factors that affected the creation and application of the reforms under scrutiny.

A total of 30 experts and stakeholders were originally contacted via the LinkedIn platform. Moreover, a total of 9 interviews have been completed from the initial pool of 30 approached subjects. However, one of the participants made the decision to withdraw

from the study at a certain point throughout the research process. In accordance with a mutual agreement, the interview recording along with all additional information that was collected within the meeting have been disposed of. Therefore, a total number of 8 interviews have been conducted and employed within this research. Additionally, each respondent has consented to have their exact role, name, and any other sensitive or identifiable information removed. The majority has agreed to have their current or former institutional affiliation published, without mentioning the exact years of activity or any other distinctive information. As the signed forms might lead to revealing the identity of the interview subjects, only the contents and structure of the informed consent is made available in section F of the Appendices.

However, since all the respondents operate or have previously operated within public institutions, an exceptionally important disclaimer must be put forward. **The transcripts and any additional information gathered from the individual interviews which aided in the analysis of the results should be regarded as the interviewee's personal viewpoint and not as the institution's official position.**

The expert interviews took place over a two-week period, via a video conferencing platform. The table depicted below lists the experts who participated in the interviews, along with their current or former institutional affiliation. One of the respondents did not agree on declaring his/her organisation. Section G of the Appendices comprises of the interview transcripts, which depict the precise date, hour, and duration of each meeting.

Interviewee Code	Institution
P1	Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania
P2	N/A
P3	General Secretariat of the Government
P4	Chamber of Deputies
P5	Chancellery of Prime Minister
P6	Chamber of Deputies
P7	Chancellery of Prime Minister
P8	Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation

Table 1. Interview Respondents

As previously assessed, the interviews' questions originated from the operationalisation of the variables depicted within the transformative approach of Christensen and Læg Reid (2016). An English translation of the interview guide can be located in section E of the Appendices.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

3.3.2.1 Literature Analysis

As stated by Simons (2020), observations in case study research are more likely to be detailed close-up accounts of events that take place in a specific setting. Moreover, the goal of this study endeavour is to present the setting or occurrence in its entirety, while giving the audience a foundation for further assessment and interpretation (Simons 2020). For this reason, the data analysis contributed to both a detailed description of the events in Romania and the domestic institutional occurrences composing the case study. Moreover, the data extracted within the conceptual framework led to the discovery of multiple theories. Among these, the transformative perspective derived from organisational theory, as enhanced by Christensen and Læg Reid (2016) stood out as being suitable for the complex context of the Romanian digital-related reconfigurations. Thus, the variables previously defined in this chapter, namely, the *Environmental Pressures*, the *Cultural Factors*, *Polity Features* were operationalised via both the literature review process and the creation of a thorough interview guide.

3.3.2.2 Interview Analysis

Later, the formerly defined elements of the transformative framework have been denominated as parent nodes within the manual coding procedures realised with the aid of the NVivo qualitative coding software (Lumivero n.d.). Other motivations derived from these factors and mentioned in the interviews were placed under the parent nodes umbrella and will be further addressed within the *Results* and *Discussions* chapters.

Before going through more detailed explanations on how the data was operationalised, it is important to state that a thorough testing of interview coding software took place before finally opting for employing the NVivo software within this process. Since the research within this dissertation is a deductive one, after only two attempts to produce coding generated by artificial intelligence (AI) with the help of ATLAS.ti (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH n.d.), the thought of leveraging the coding strenuous process with the help of AI was dropped. This is because the codes created by AI were not compatible with a pre-existing coding frame and were thus challenging to visualise.

Saldaña (2020) claims that the objective of coding in qualitative data analysis is to provide every piece of data a condensed, abstract significance for the goals of qualitative analysis. Therefore, the codes work to structure, categorise, and then reorganise the results into new groups for additional study and analysis. Descriptive codes, which are mostly made up of nouns, have been utilised to render this process smoother because they prove notably helpful when several forms of data, such as documents and interviews, are collected within the aim of a single research (Saldaña 2020). Moreover, the approach of coding employed within the assessment of the interviews was selective coding. According to (Creswell 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark 2018), selective coding implies first choosing a group of central factors at the crux of the phenomena under scrutiny, and further relate it to other subcategories. Consequently, arguments may be thus broken down into low-level observations, which discuss and explain what is taking place inside the specifics of the situation in question (Saldaña 2020), and high-level findings, which aid in generating assumptions about what the situation implies in the larger context and therefore follow the objective of including each category and subcategory into the bigger, comprehensive storyline (Saldaña 2020). However, the significance of each code and the interplay among them will be extensively covered in the *Results* and *Discussions* sections.

In addition, a clear visualisation of the codes is essential as to portray the final results of the interviews, which is usually achieved with the help of a qualitative codebook (Creswell 2009). According to Creswell (2009), this codebook could contain the descriptions of the codes, the titles of the codes, and the number of occurrences where the code originated from in the transcripts. As previously mentioned, a codebook following the same structural delineation is provided within the section H of the Appendix.

Parent Code	Total Number of Children Codes and Sub-Codes	References	Mentioned in
Environmental Pressures	15	101	All Interviews
Cultural Factors	29	186	All Interviews
Polity Features	16	68	All Interviews

Table 2. Total References depicted within the Body of Interviews

However, given the fact that a total of 63 parent and children codes have been extracted (*as shown in Table 2*), the table comprises only the descriptions of the *Environmental Pressures*, the *Cultural Factors*, and *Polity Features*, as the key operationalised variables.

Moreover, the rest of the children variables and their sub-coded references are offered a rigorous assessment within the *Results* and *Discussion* chapters.

Trent and Cho (2020) argue that, according to Barrett's (2011, as cited in Trent and Cho 2020) principles of interpretation, every event has one or more interpretations, which could vary or, conversely, prove to be against one another. It is common knowledge that there is rarely a single correct meaning, and this renders things even more intricate within the context of institutional reform and its high grade of contextuality. Therefore, the interpretations are thus supposed to be supported by additional data. Hence, the procedure through which the derived codes were operationalised within the *Results* chapter could then be considered rather as an incremental one, meaning that it represented a continuous process comprised of multiple phases of interview analysis triangulated with support from existing literature and documents.

4 The Case of Romania

According to Hințea (2020), the setting has a significant impact on a reform's goals, procedures, and metrics for completion or overall achievement. Constructing the premises of the study's climate is therefore important, even though the primary claim of this thesis is not to evaluate the success of the institutional change within the context of Romania. Following this line of reasoning, this chapter sets to shed light on Romania's political and administrative history, as well as on the numerous institutional transformations that resulted in the current organisational structure. Nonetheless, this section additionally provides significant granular information on the evaluation of Romania's digital performance within the Digital Economy and Society Indexes, which will subsequently be empirically evaluated, contrasted, and compared within the assessment of the *Results* chapter.

4.1 Brief Polity Background

Situated between the diametrically opposed administrative traditions of the Balkans and the West, Romania reflects the region's middle ground. Following the structural patterns and historical administrative model of Central and Eastern Europe, Romania is a former one-party, communist state (Stan 2013). According to Hințea et al. (2002), the Romanian system has had to overcome many barriers following the revolution of 1989, due to a lengthy fermentation of darker communist shadows, such as centralisation, structural politicisation of various institutional bodies, and total absence of civilian engagement. However, although Romania mirrors a rather mild transitional system, which boosts space for political reform and is much more consistent than that of other former communist states (Stan 2013), the decision-making realm in what concerns the digitalisation agenda has proven to be far less coherent than that of the Western European countries. Nonetheless, the digital dimension and organisation of capacities within the ministerial bodies will only be addressed later within this chapter.

However, in contrast to Stan's (2013) claims, according to which Romania's administrative and legal features expand the opportunity for political reform, Hinteá (2008) contends that Romania's administrative climate did not serve as an impetus neither for transformation, nor reform. According to Hinteá (2008), the downfall of communist regime triggered an array of repercussions of concentrated and ideologically motivated systems of administration, a culture of organisational behaviour built around principles deemed incompatible with the ones of democracy, such as wide-ranging corruption, and the absence of functional governing bodies capable of planning and implementing reform. Needless to say, many contend that these intricate webs of inherited

misdeemeanours might have built or ingrained a culture of factors which might be potentially attributed to the country's current predicament.

Since the fall of communism, public administration reform has been a priority for each government in power. Additionally, the European Union accession demands, international pressures, scholarly community, and citizens were the main drivers for emerging managerial ideas such as purposeful planning and implementation, and assessment of performance frameworks (Hintea 2008). Moreover, even prior to entering the European Union, Romania, among other Central and Eastern European nations relied on pre-accession mechanisms to help improve their infrastructure, advance their administrative organisations, and boost their economies (Țigănașu et al. 2018). This could be assessed as a first instance in which technical pressures emerging from the environment boosted the administrative desire for purposeful reformation of prior institutional structures and frameworks.

In the year of 2007, during the fifth wave of EU enlargement, Romania became a Member State of the European Union, which shifted the polity setting. According to the European Council in Copenhagen (1993, as cited in Hințea et al. 2002), EU accession requires that the applicant nation attained a level of institutional stability and was able to ensure the functioning of democracy, the supremacy of the law, and fundamental freedoms. Therefore, in order to provide the circumstances for an effective entry into the EU, Romania, like other prospective aspirant nations, had to improve and modify its administrative structures (Hințea et al. 2002).

To make it easier for European strategies to be implemented following this enlargement wave, the Central and Eastern European impacted nations have been served with a favourable environment in which to do so, as previously asserted by Țigănașu et al. (2018). However, the authors further contended that the – now admitted – Member States in the region still have substantial deficiencies in the performance of their governance organisations and frameworks, which makes it difficult for their authorities to enact the right structural adjustments and policies to achieve any of the benefits provided by the absorption of various EU monetary resources, while preserving future economic expansion (Țigănașu et al. 2018).

However, as shown in section C of the Appendix, the Romanian Government suffers from a daunting lack of political continuity. Between December 1999 and current times, Romania had no less than 22 Prime Ministers. Furthermore, there are several constitutional provisions that define the process for choosing and removing the Prime Minister, along with potential causes in which a termination of one's mandate might occur. According to Article 106 of the Constitution, a member of the government loses

their position upon resignation, revocation, loss of voting privileges, incompatibility, death, and other occurrences specified by law (*Constitution of Romania* 1991). Article 110, para. 2 goes further into explaining the additional occurrences which might entail the dismissal of the Prime Minister (*Constitution of Romania* 1991). Accordingly, the Constitution stipulates that the failure of the PM to perform the ensuing responsibilities for a period of 45 days or the situation in which the government is removed based on the Parliament's vote of confidence withdrawal are additional factors that might result in a shift in the executive's leadership (Constitution of Romania 1991, art 110, para. 2).

As a result, the variety of PMs who governed over the Romanian executive realm may only sketch the concept of an administrative incongruity in terms of goals and tactics for administrative change. Because of these factors, the lingering effects of the communist era, and the abundance of literature showing that Romania's reforms were primarily driven by its accession to the EU, Romania is characterised, to a certain extent, as patiently waiting for an external institution to step in and save it in need. This external assistance oftentimes provides direction, support, and impetus, which are somewhat absent from the Romanian institutional framework, most likely due to an observable discontinuity in terms of executive leadership.

4.1.1 A Tradition of Legalistic Reform

As in the case of most post-communist nations, decentralisation and regional sovereignty were set forth as fundamentals of the 1991-adopted Constitution (*Constitution of Romania* 1991; Hinteá et al. 2002). In what concerns the national public administration, post-communist decentralisation was initially concentrated on the transfer of duties and obligations to local authorities (Petrescu and Mihalache 2020, Neamtu, 2022). Within the subsequent phases, once the early efforts were completed, the emphasis switched toward enhancing local government service delivery effectiveness and performance (Petrescu and Mihalache 2020, Neamtu, 2022). The expansion of the variety of policy sectors given to local governments throughout this phase was yet another noteworthy accomplishment (Neamtu 2016).

Moreover, the separation of powers between all three branches of the administration is an up-held tenet outlined within the Constitution (Constitution of Romania 1991, art. 1, para. 4). In terms of the executive, which is the core setting under scrutiny within the scope of this thesis, the Prime Minister is appointed by the President, and charged with the responsibility of choosing the group of ministers that will assist in running the government's affairs and sectors (Hintea 2008). Moreover, it is important to assert that there are several political factions engaged in the intricate webs of the Romanian multi-party framework. However, their impact or their influence on reform has been difficult to

ascertain. This is because, according to Hinteá (2008), while some political groups have taken up the issue of administrative reform across time, their approach lacks a clear strategy.

According to Verheijen (1999, as cited in Hinteá et al. 2002), Romanian administrative reform has historically been referred as solely the enactment of statutes and rules. Moreover, legislation has frequently been perceived as the primary tool for administrative reform. In the Romanian setting, public stakeholders seem to entirely disregard the implementation and the transformation's ensuing contribution, which therefore led to a plethora of inflexible administrative structures that have been failing to function within the desired effectiveness parameters (Hintea et al. 2002). These claims are strengthened by Răuță (2015), who explains that legalistic administration is usually tightly controlled and generally associated with Weberian thought. His study measuring domestic reforms thus revealed that, although legislation and the judiciary are frequently addressed within the assessed instances of reform, the topics of standards or guidelines are not as frequently employed (Răuță 2015). Additionally, Răuță (2015) also reached the conclusion that the Romanian Government is primarily concerned with lawfulness, while the objective of performance is oftentimes sorted out.

However, Răuță's (2015) analysis origins seven years ago, which can be viewed as inappropriate sole foundational argument for the characteristics of the reforms placed at the centre of empirical investigation within this thesis. Therefore, the additional elements that could have contributed to the aim to make the digitalisation sector more efficient should thus be examined. But first, providing a glance into the state of the art of Romanian digitalisation performances and its historical intricacies is necessary.

4.2 The Narrative of Romanian Digitalisation

Despite the augmentation of previous policy sectors and the need to catch pace with the European Union's Digital Agenda (European Parliament n.d.) and the thorough regulations of the digital realm, Romania is still listed among the last Member States in the Digital Economy and Society Index (European Commission 2016b, 2017a, 2018, 2021, 2022). However, at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2019, Romania was ranked 26th out of 28 European Union Member States (European Commission 2019). In the year of 2020, Romania occupied the antepenultimate place (European Commission 2020), mostly as a result of the constrained availability or inadequate creation of electronic public services (Niță 2021)

In the research he conducted, Mihălcescu (2022) observed that decision-makers possessed an undetermined belief concerning the demands and expectations of digital

change processes in Romania, and frequently employed EU digital legislations and directives, as well as the demand to establish more open and accountable public bodies in their discourse. According to his results, decision-makers believe that European Union regulations are the primary factor that might compel Romania to execute their declared desiderate, since the unfortunate truth regarding essential infrastructures in the charge of digitalisation is that they are utterly fragile (Mihălcescu 2022). This therefore shows a lack of clear mission and goals, as well as an inherent expectation that, somehow, the European Union, as a main engine for transformation, will propel the current state of Romanian digitalisation into new heights. However, such expectations lack a consistent approach towards performance and efficiency.

In order to comprehend the causes of inefficiency and persistent falling behind with regard to current digitalisation norms, a more comprehensive picture of the governmental realm's approach to digitalisation should be supplied. In his writings, Nicoară (2018) presents an overarching example about the fluctuating development of the structures in charge of the eGovernment area within the domestic setting. Therefore, in his illustration, he strives to compare two Governmental Decrees, from 1992 and, respectively, 2017, that were both in effect at the time of his research. While he argues that the 1992 Governmental Decree is unambiguously arranged and enforces explicit technical rules on institutions with regard to digitisation and online accessibility practices – “*even though at the time a nationwide data transmission network has not yet been established*” (Nicoară 2018, p. 198) –, the 2017 document has a story-driven structure that spares the burden of a legal impact (Nicoară 2018).

Nicoară (2018) also contends that, formerly, more ministries had the legal authority to enact secondary legislation that was oftentimes averse to that emitted by other structures of the central administration, or to the one of local public entities. For instance, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, along with the Romanian Intelligence Service were responsible for preserving electronic records and ensuring data exchange between various state actors (Nicoară 2018). However, no piece of literature provides a coherent historical account of all the institutions in charge of all facets of the digital transition and how they have changed over time. Although lacking in specificity, the most practical method to construct such a framework would be to combine various pieces of legislation, Governmental Decrees, Emergency Ordinances, and earlier studies carried out by the European organisations.

Within the scope of Europe's Digital Progress Report (EDPR) on Romania from 2016, the only ministerial body mentioned to address the intricacies of digitalisation – through EU-funded projects – has been the Ministry of Communications and Information Society

(European Commission 2016a). Within the EDPR on Romania from 2017, The Ministry of Education and Research was described as putting together multiple initiatives to improve youth's digital literacy (European Commission 2017b). In the DESI report of the year 2018, the Ministry of Communications and Information Society has been mentioned – once more – as having initiated a public discussion on a grant scheme for projects that tackled the urban-rural digital gap (European Commission 2018). Within the following year's DESI report, the same ministry was mentioned again, as it was undergoing the drafting process for an Interoperability Law proposal (European Commission 2019). However, the amount of interoperability across public administration services is often poor, according to the previously mentioned DESI study from 2019, since each public institution concentrated on its own digital public service (European Commission 2019).

The literature and other reporting materials released by various national or European authorities consequently indicate a variety of institutions that have engaged in the digital transformation initiatives across the years. However, the following sub-chapter will deal with the complexities of digital capacity reform and how these capacities have been changed and transitioned within the main three reforms whose assessments are at the crux of this thesis. Nonetheless, a particular inference that might be drawn from previous assertions is that the institutional sphere of digitalisation seems to lack a comprehensive legal capacity structure as well as technical or operational clarity.

However, initiatives have been undertaken to commence the flowing of the digitalisation movement. Nevertheless, most of the retrieved resources with regard to this topic do not cease to mention, once again, the invisible helping hand of EU mechanisms and regulative plethora as driving forces for the advancement of digitalisation endeavours. According to Voicu (2018), the existing Romanian system is set up in such a manner that stakeholders compete for the sake of control of the structure rather than to revamp and streamline the wider governmental apparatus.

In the light of previous assertions, it goes without saying that the status of EU member contributes to guiding Romanian authorities towards the coordination of digital-related capacities. Therefore, in 2013, Romania commenced the task of creating and defining its own National Strategy for the Digital Agenda for 2020, in line with its rights and obligations to actively participate in the design and execution of public plans and policies at the European level (Cotovelea 2018). Moreover, the Ministry of Communications and Information Society was the entity directing the execution of the strategy (Cotovelea 2018), as authorised by Government Decree no. 245/2015 (Romanian Government 2015). Both the European Commission and the Romanian Government supplied and ensured the funding required for the carrying out of this policy (Cotovelea 2018).

Nevertheless, according to Morariu (2022), one recent representative step that the government is still working to accomplish is the Governmental Cloud, the key output of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan's (NRRP) investments in Romania's digital shift, which aims at linking together the country's core public administration entities in a unified, trustworthy, and stronger IT framework. Moreover, Niță (2021) emphasised that the NRRP was developed as an instrument of the EU to offer considerable monetary assistance during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus aimed at accelerating the adoption of long-term reforms and associated public investments in each of the Member States. Under the prerogatives and milestones of the NRRP, Romania should therefore align to adaptable and interoperable mechanisms as a response to the proposals of the European Commission on the beginning of green growth expansion and the rise of the digital economy (Niță 2021).

Therefore, this cursory examination of the public digital archives reveals that, until 2019, a plethora of governmental administrative entities were competent for establishing how to implement various digital policies in a very diffusive yet ambiguous manner. The state agenda plans and strategies up to 2020 have been carried out by a variety of public institutions, from the Ministry of Education and Research to the Ministry of Communications and Information Society, and more. However, none of the previously mentioned institutions maintained the same structure over the span of years, as portrayed in section D of the Appendix. This has caused digitalisation to shift from being a component placed under the umbrella of multiple institutions, to occupying a much more specified place in the governmental arrangements, starting with the institutional reforms of November 2019 – December 2020. These latest occurrences will be dealt with in-depth within the span of the next section.

4.2.1 Latest Ministerial Reconfigurations

There are currently eighteen ministries in the Romanian Government (Romanian Government n.d.). By 2019, through preliminary research, multiple ministries among these, some of which are no longer in operation, have been identified to have an overall role in Romania's digital transformation process. Some of them can nonetheless be depicted in section D of the Appendix, which provides an overview of the transformations they have undergone across the past twenty-three years. As a result, one can assess that the latest governmental reorganisation culminated not only in the decision to create a new ministry solely dedicated to digitalisation, innovation, and research, but also in merging or dissolving some of the formerly existing ministries. The competencies that have been transferred between these ministries as a result of their relocation and restructuring, however, are where the complexity of this assessment lies. A detailed investigation is

needed to determine not only which digital attributions have been retained or transferred within the new arrangement, but to additionally lay the contextual basis for the rationales for reform.

Domains related to the realms of research, innovation, communication, and information technology have not been fully joined (as shown in section D of the Appendices), up until 2019. Thus, these sectors have been generally kept distinct from one another, or merged within various setups. For instance, under the Governmental Emergency Ordinance no. 68/2019, the infrastructure-related element transitioned from the former Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, which was fused with the former Ministry of Communications and Society Information and resulted in a new body, coined as the Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Communications (MTIC) (The Government of Romania 2019, art. 5, paras. 1-2). These occurrences are depicted in the figure below.

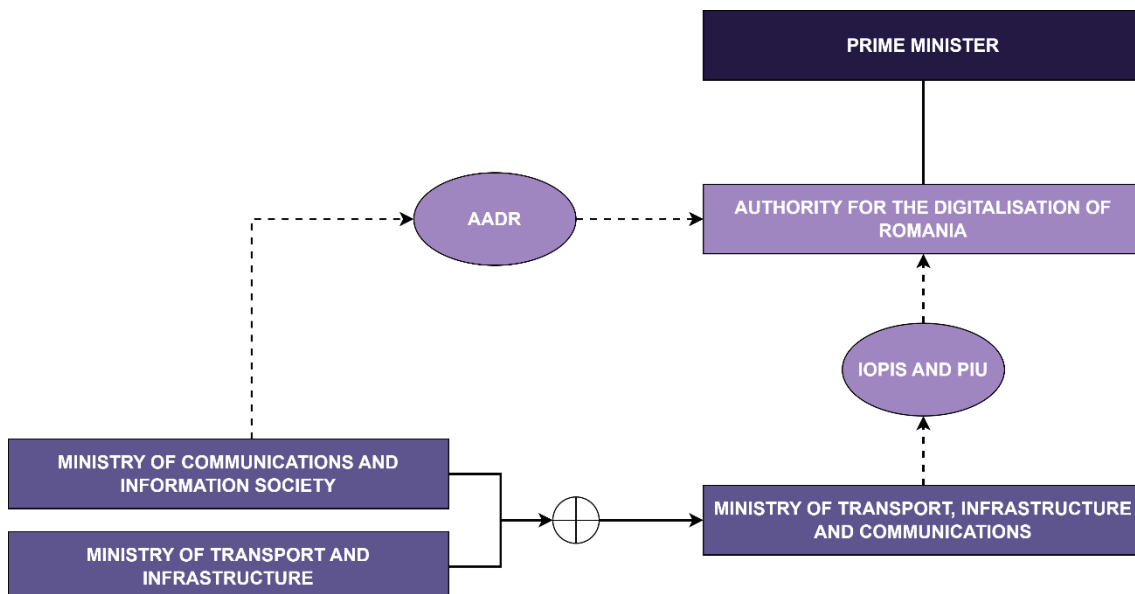


Figure 3. Institutional Reform under GEO no. 68/2019 and GEO no. 90/2019

Moreover, the same GEO additionally included the establishment of a new institutional body, named as the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, created explicitly for the efforts of digital transformation, and placed under the authority of the Prime Minister (The Government of Romania 2019, art. 11, para. 2). ADR took over the responsibilities of the Agency's for Romania's Digital Agenda, which was subordinated to the now disbanded MCIS (The Government of Romania 2019, art. 11, para. 2). The MCIS used to oversee ARDA, a specialised public institution with legal status, placed within the central public administration. Its main responsibility was to administer and operate multiple information technology frameworks at the national scale as to support the development of eGovernment, and was in charge of several digital initiatives, such as the Electronic Public Procurement System, the National Electronic System of Online Fee and

Tax Payment, the Electronic Single Contact Point, and more (“Despre Agenția Pentru Agenda Digitală a României [About the Digital Agenda Agency of Romania]” 2016).

Therefore, the month of November 2019 witnessed a highly complex institutional shift as a result of a thorough institutional reform that focused on restructuring digital capabilities at the level of Romanian ministries. However, the end of December 2019 brought an array of additional governmental changes, as Romania was in danger of falling short of several of the goals set forth in the Tallinn Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment, as well as in the National Strategy regarding the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020 (Romanian Government 2019b).

Therefore, according to the Governmental Emergency Ordinance no. 90, urgent measures were required in order to operationalise ADR (Romanian Government 2019b). According to this GEO, at the end of 2019, ADR was still the structure responsible for achieving the objectives assumed by Romania through the National Strategy regarding the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020. Thus, in order to speed up the achievement of previously established targets and commitments, the formerly mentioned GEO emphasises that ADR took over from MTIC the attributions, positions and staff of the Intermediate Organisation for the Promotion of the Information Society (IOPIS) and of the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) (Romanian Government 2019b, art. 1, para. 1). Moreover, Article 1, para. 2 of the very same GEO stipulated that, within ADR, the former IOPIS structure will operate as a General Directorate (Romanian Government 2019b), which has been depicted within the Organisational Chart of ADR, as provided in section A of the Appendices.

A year later, multiple other ministries have undergone subsequent rigorous reconfigurations. Among these, the Ministry of Education was established through the partial division of the Ministry of Education and Research (Romanian Government 2020a, art. 4, para. 1). Thus, the field of research and innovation (with the exception of the prerogatives regarding the financing of higher education) was taken over by a novel Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation (Romanian Government 2020a, art. 4, para. 2, pt. a). Moreover, MRID also took over the activities and personnel corresponding to the field of communications from MTIC (Romanian Government 2020a, art. 4, para. 2, pt. b), which has now been parted and re-established in the form of the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (Romanian Government 2020a, art. 3, paras. 1-2). Nonetheless, ADR was moved from the coordination of the Prime Minister under the coordination of the newly established ministry (Romanian Government 2020a) art. 7). This second set of restructurings are depicted in the figure below.

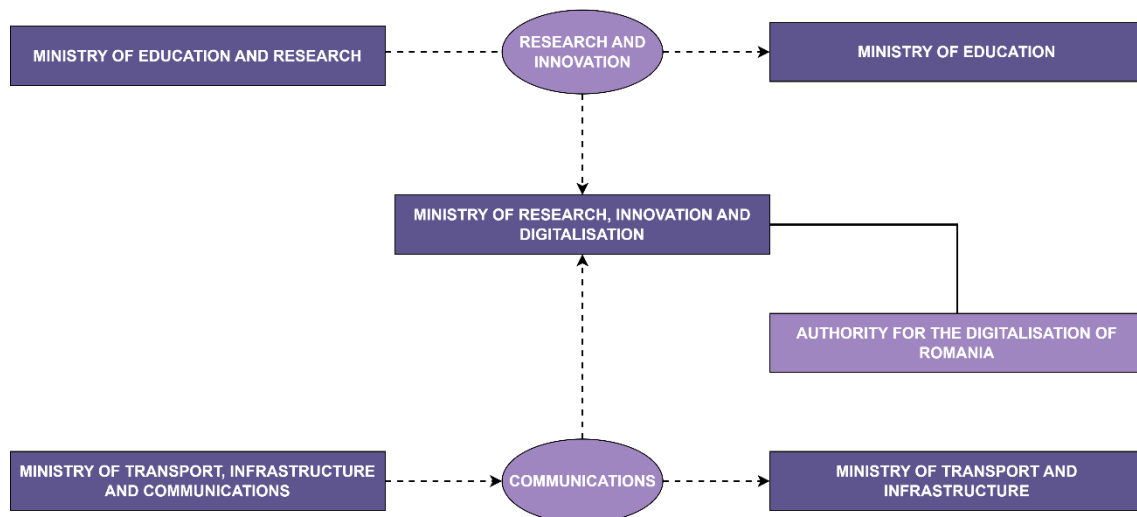


Figure 4. Institutional Reform under GEO no. 212/2020

Therefore, the threshold between the end 2019 and the end of 2020 depicted an array of changes in the area of Romanian digital transformation. As previously portrayed, the executive had already set in motion the operationalisation of this domain by reorganising its central structures and transferring attributions, rights, obligations and staff of now abolished institutions to newly formed ones. However, in order to better grasp this ambiguous and fussy phenomenon, it is critical to examine more thoroughly what were the motivations and rationales behind the enactment of these three GEOs which radically changed the order of digital capacities within the span of only one year.

However, among the rationales provided within the corpus of GEO 90/2019 (Romanian Government 2019b), the reorganisation aimed at creating an effective institutional framework for the digitalisation of public services, strengthened by motivations such as:

- the low position of the country in the DESI index,
- the attainment of the goals assumed by Romania via the National Strategy regarding the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020,
- the organisational deficiencies resulting from the absence of uniform coordination, and
- the possibility of the European Commission initiating infringement proceedings, as well as the risk of jeopardising resources for operations which were funded by the European Commission.

Regardless of the aforementioned, there is still a paucity of research on the variables and underlying rationales for these continuous transformations which shifted digitalisation coordination from centralised decision streams towards decentralised systems, and vice-

versa. Although the main motivations that could be depicted in official documents and assessed literature relate to a sort of technical pressure placing additional tension over the reform decision, this issue still lacks investigational depths. Consequently, it is as important to research on whether solely technical pressures and the requirement to adhere to wider demands or commitments to the EU market have influenced the implementation of these institutional arrangements. What this reflects about Romania's public administration, organisational and management structure, synchronisation, coherence, and coordination of digital policymaking are some of the facets that require further exploration and that are addressed within both the *Results* and *Discussions* chapters, with the aid of expert interviews.

5 Results

The findings chapter, which builds on the conceptual blocks depicted within the theoretical framework and guides the reader through the examination of the formerly operationalised variables, serves as the thesis' defining milestone. As a consequence, this section examines how the three primary variables – Environmental Pressures, Polity Features and Cultural Factors, as emphasised by Christensen and Lægheid (2016) – interact with the additional complexities and factors that have shaped Romania's reform processes and painted the underlying rationales' canvas. The statements of the interview subjects will also be triangulated and backed with additional supporting materials, originating either from the scholarly literature or from the governmental sphere, in an effort to enhance the validity of their assertions. Additionally, significant direct remarks and quotations retrieved from the interviews' transcripts will further be offered for the purpose of demonstrating the direct specimens of texts that have been employed in the assessment of specific instances.

As previously highlighted, this thesis focuses on the one hand, on the reform that led to the creation of the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, the implicit dissolution of the former Ministry of Communications and Information Society – which has been previously addressed within *The Case of Romania* chapter – and the placement of ADR within the subordination of the Prime Minister. On the other hand, it additionally sheds light on the ensuing modifications and reforms that led to the creation of the new Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation, whose design incorporated the placement of the Authority for Digitalisation in its subordination. However, in order to illustrate the rationales behind these governmental occurrences, the interviewees additionally provided a glimpse into earlier circumstances and events that helped to shape the narrative of the Romanian eGovernment climate. This is of particular significance because, as shown through the richness of the following results of this study, having a synopsis of the broader Romanian digitalisation environment throughout an extended period of time assisted in operationalisation of all the pre-established variables, while building associations between them whenever necessary.

By underscoring Christensen and Lægheid's (2016) concept of dynamic logic of actions, it is important to highlight the fact that all these variables have been analysed complementarily and inter-linked within the body of this section. This is because, in a way or another, they all interconnect in shaping the reform processes and are shaped by the reform processes in return (Christensen and Lægheid 2016). As enhanced by the two authors, the transformational perspective's core variables involve a reciprocal dependence among reforms, structural characteristics, cultural norms, and environmental

pressure (Christensen and Læg Reid 2016). Therefore, when deemed as interrelated, polity or cultural features will be assessed in tandem with technical or institutional sources of pressure. The relationship between these variables will be further illustrated utilising literature from additional sources.

Starting from a first dimension which has received a modest ranking with regard to its importance in the rationale of reform, institutional pressures, a sub-type of environmental pressures, were not convincingly acknowledged by the interview participants as a steering element for the reconfigurations of digital capacities. Apparently, this elusive world, which in the interviews was operationalised as the realm of European values and internalisation of good cross-border practices, was not seen as a main engine for transformation or an ideal towards which the Romanian administration aimed in defining these reforms. However, respondent P4 noted, as a potential variable related to this world of principles, a desire, or rather a trend towards modernisation, depicted at the level of all political parties:

“When you want to do good or modernise the country, you do not have to have a reason for that. Modernisation itself is the reason. And you see, that was not just a PNL [National Liberal Party] thing, but it was a movement in all the political parties. They all realised it was time for modernisation.”

The same respondent has also emphasised how the Romanian public administration has a propensity for siding with the majority of other Member States and attempts to follow their lead. Additionally, numerous examples of good practices have been offered by multiple other interviews, from successful practices in Estonia and Denmark (as per interviewee P2), to Italy, France, Germany (as per interviewee P4), and even South Korea, New Zealand, and Singapore (as per interviewee P3). However, the consensus was that, instead of trying to modernise in accordance with such digital nations, there is a salient resignation and lack of governmental effort to adapt to such instances. As claimed by respondent P4,

“In general, a Romanian administrative cultural custom is portrayed by this resignation that: “Yes, what others do looks great, but it will never be possible to have that in Romania”.”

However, interviewee P6 has presented this resignation and fear of commitment from a little more critical standpoint. According to respondent P6, there is both “*paranoia and a fear of responsibility*” in the Romanian public administration. Nonetheless, the issue of accountability within the realm of domestic central administration will be thoroughly dealt with within the scope of the *Discussions* section.

While maintaining the lens of analysis within the environmental pressures dimension, the major factor that has been put forth by all respondents as having a direct influence on the

reformation processes of both the current instance under inquiry and the preceding institutional reform occurrences has been the one of technical pressures. Subsequently, it is important to underscore the fact that these technical pressures have been installed within the interview guide as more of an internalisation of direct EU-related forces, the domestic organisational flaws the European Commission or other actors have identified in their various accounts and reports, or potential variables derived from the Romanian economic and technological climate.

As additionally emphasised within *The Case of Romania* chapter, it may be contended that the technological pressure from external channels, such as the EU, has been absorbed by the domestic environment in the format of technical pressures. One primary example of this absorption is the acknowledgment of low-ranking scores within EU scoreboards related to the fields of digital transformation and innovation. As to reflect this, four out of the eight interviewees mentioned they acknowledge the DESI index rating as a key sign of Romania's digitalisation performance:

“Obviously, the political discourse is towards efficiency, towards digital public services, but practically, this is not happening, and this is reflected also in the DESI measurements.” (as per respondent P3)

“We undoubtedly deserve our last place in the DESI indexes. Data shows the reality of the market, in the end.” (as per respondent P6)

“Apart from the fact that the EU is constantly not happy with how we solve the digitalisation issues [...]” (as per respondent P7)

“[...] and especially on the measurement side. Although we are always raking last, and we do not like it. But this could motivate us, first of all, to measure.” (as per respondent P8)

Some respondents, however, argued that the DESI results are not sufficiently representative of the actual state of Romania's digitalisation, and blamed this on a lack of accurate or extensive internal assessment, which was pitched as an issue of organisational culture. This implies that, as interviewee P8 contended, the public administration fails to measure all existing e-services as a result of the lack of certain descriptions of the services and an evaluation methodology that requires the presence of such descriptive elements in order to be taken into account in the measurement. Răuță (2015), who conducted a study on general rationales for Romanian administrative reform, noted that there is hardly any history of quality or accessibility standards in regard to the Romanian performance criteria within the realm of decision-making. Moreover, he asserted that the Romanian policy frameworks and processes lack both dimensions of performance and transparency (Răuță 2015).

However, a lack of objective measurement has additionally been stated as cause for concern by some of the interviewees. Additionally, while respondent P2 has argued that

an authentic, qualified, and autonomous impact assessment is required, which should not be endorsed by the same organisation that is being assessed, P7 was particularly forthright in suggesting that the Romanian approach to evaluating institutional capabilities, in general, is not impartial:

“The lack [of measurement] is related to the fact that measurements, traditionally in Romania, are not considered to be objective. When someone comes and measures something one has done, the measurement result is somehow mostly politically evaluated: people think you have something against them, or that you want to sabotage them.”

As previously underscored, interviewee P8 strengthens the arguments made by both two previous respondents by pointing out that Romanian authorities do not measure or represent the fair current state of affairs in their national reporting:

“For example, I know that the accessibility of public services is measured, and we have some functioning public services in place, but they have no description. And then, those who check and have a very accurate methodology for verifying public services [...] have to grade those services with 0 points. This is because, although those services are being used and are very good, they have no description.”

These claims are supported within the broader academic literature on public administration, with Marche and McNiven (2003) assessing that, in general, the typical perception about public administration is that it is siloed, or functionally isolated. Moreover, the authors underline that, whenever addressing people’s requirements, government entities often fail to integrate service providing, which seems to have been influenced somewhat by ingrained cultural norms and practices that are upheld by the custom of ministerial accountability (Marche and McNiven 2003). Additionally, two of the interviewees asserted that the financial burden caused by these siloed digital facets of administration was an argument in favour of the enactment of reform.

Respondent P8 asserted, however, that in the past two years, implicitly following the two waves of reform, a lot of attention has been placed on part of the DESI metrics, particularly on the requirement that institutions must be vigilant with regard to how they evaluate and report their findings. Respondent P1 supports this assertion with claims that the currently operating Authority of Digitalisation conducted several studies with the goal of evaluating the metrics provided by the European Commission. Additionally, according to P1, ADR structured meetings with public bodies in an effort to communicate the idea that services in question must provide a brief and straightforward overview of their characteristics in order to be coupled into the overall system of indicators. This was done in an effort to reduce the failure of erroneous measurements attributed to the lack of explicit description of currently available services. In addition, the same respondent recounted a measuring attempt that was made with a view to assessing the digital capabilities of public employees. Their objective aimed at arriving at some organisational

guidelines and suggestions for the prospective enhancement of digital practices or competencies of individuals working in the public administration. However, according to respondent P1, the study had undesirable outcomes:

“[...] the studies we have carried out show that the medium to advanced digital skills level at the moment is somewhere around 3% at the level of public administration. The rest is somewhere in the basic or below basic area, which is a major problem in the current context, in which everyone is talking about digital stuff everywhere.”

In addition to respondent P1's statements, respondents P2, P4, and P6 brought up the same issue throughout their responses, emphasising the fact that relatively few public workers are digitally literate. In his attempt to depict a brief history on the background of Romanian digital education, Jugureanu (2018) contended that, even today, a proper understanding of digital cognitive ability remains to be attained, especially since academic subjects like digital identity, critical thinking, privacy management, cyber security, and digital footprint management continue to remain omitted from the educational programmes dedicated to Romanian pupils and students. Needless to say, the author addresses how the lack of such education has a detrimental effect, reflected in the growth of irrational fears and anguish among the general population related to what digitalisation entails (Jugureanu 2018).

Respondent P4 pondered on the element of absence of digital education as well, indicating that it is a “*systemic problem*”. Such assertions are supported by Stoica and Ghilic-Micu (2020), who assess that, for governmental bodies, the challenge of eGovernment is more about persuading the individuals into agreeing that this is the best course of action, than it is about incorporating the respective electronic devices into their daily operations, as people frequently reject innovation and are resistant to it when it is introduced. Moreover, when pointing out to the former interview participant that this might rather be seen as a population-wide cultural component, interviewee P4 argued:

“That is where the issue stems from. This is also transmitted into institutions [...]. This culture also has access to institutions because you may be given the smartest laptop in the world [...], but if you do not know how to use it, it is in vain. You can have a deeply digitalised society or government, a Governmental Cloud, you can have everything digital and fast, [...] but... In addition to all this effort, you will also have a huge effort in training the civil servants. Nobody is talking about that, but that would have a profound impact, because the relationship with the citizen will change instantly.”

Although not explicitly acknowledged by the participants, this could potentially be interpreted as a logical justification as to why digitalisation was being kept (as per P8) and is continuously being kept at the declarative priority level, as mentioned by P1, P2, P3, and P7. Hristea (2018) strengthens this claim by contending that, between 2008 and 2018, the (now former) ministry in charge of digital initiatives has played a purely

declarative role in terms of its effective participation in the compelling management of the execution of digitalisation. Moreover, as to justify these assertions, the author assesses that the result of this double-talking and declaratory behaviour led to a plethora of inconsistent approaches, initiatives which fail to start with actual demands, generic services unadjusted to specific needs, disproportionate or large technical solutions, and expenses which cannot be justified by the actual advantages (Hristea 2018).

Therefore, six out of the eight participants pointed out the Romanian central authorities' tradition of continuous digital initiatives' implementation in spite of the deficient execution and erroneous outcomes of research, analyses, or even policies. Consequently, the modest results within DESI scoreboards (European Commission 2016b, 2017a, 2018), associated with the high correlation within the interview responses, may lead readers into reasoning that the reform was conducted by a strategic thinking to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of digitalisation coordination. However, the results of the interviews portray a different picture. Keeping this in mind, the double-talking and declarative behaviours that were highlighted by the previously mentioned participants might be connected to the fact that there is a misinterpretation or real absence of an explicit goal and purpose in the case of digitalisation. For instance, P7 maintained that:

“[...] the performance that each form of institutional organisation has delivered [...] from the beginning [...] was impaired by a misunderstanding of the mission.”

This would suggest that the public environment was not truly steered by these reorganisations in the direction of an attempt to divide the duty of tracking, evaluating, and capacitating the digitalisation-related attributions of public institutions more effectively. Furthermore, although these technical demands have helped lead the whole process of moving digitalisation from a declarative stage to an operational one, these motives have been impeded by certain gloomy aspects of the polity dimension. Thus, interviewees P5, P6, and P7 have nuanced the description of what could be depicted as a culture of firefighting within the Romanian central administration. According to P5:

“Then, just as now, all the administration's effort goes towards fire-fighting and day-to-day problems. The daily processes and unexpected occurrences occupy 100% of the time of the public administration.”

These claims have been further enhanced by Hințea et al. (2002), who assessed that several government's actions have been frequently characterised as a response to particular circumstances, which were thus driving the development of public administration policies. Therefore, although some measures have been taken across time, such as the adoption of specific laws that were of strategic significance, their inherent aim was to provide an appealing facet, instead of comprising of explicit, operational, or

transparent guidelines for an intended overall well-functioning of the Romanian Government (Hințea et al. 2002).

Moreover, P6 describes the first reform, which abolished the former Ministry of Communications and Information Society and established the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania as an unforeseen decision of the back-then Prime-Minister. Presumably, the PM's initial desire was to establish what P6 termed as “*an agency based on a European Model*”. When inquired whether there had been certain myths, trends or patterns from the wider EU environment that may have influenced this decision, interviewee P6 assessed that the Premier's action was something that he would categorise as “*an impulsive decision*” that was probably determined by the advice that he received from some of his trusted advisers. Furthermore, as per P6, the apparatus of those close to the PM searched for a justification for which the replacement of the previous Ministry, an essential arm of the executive, with a government agency was insufficient for the setting of Romania.

This was claimed under the argument that an agency does not have enough power for such a horizontal topic, like digitalisation. Needless to say, there is an existing local history behind agencies in charge of digitalisation. As previously mentioned within *The Case of Romania* chapter, the Agency for Romania's Digital Agenda was a specialised public entity with legal character, located within the central public administration, and subordinated to the former and (now dissolved) MCIS, which had the attribution to assist and steer the expansion of eGovernment, its primary duty being to manage and supervise a number of national digital platforms (“*Despre Agenția Pentru Agenda Digitală a României (About the Digital Agenda Agency of Romania)*” 2016), as formerly contended in the previous chapter.

Moreover, according to respondent P7, “*the Prime Minister, within his apparatus, could not handle such a heavy and broad domain, and then a technical body was needed*”. Therefore, the government's idea was to set up an authority and subordinate it directly to the Prime-Minister, as “*to charge it with power*”, according to respondent P6. Subsequently, Interviewee P4 contended that this strategic positioning was a “*political desire for a structure to be placed on top of all those already existing*”.

Respondent P1 offered an additional possible rationale behind this first addressed reformation, which is that of the lean government:

“I think the main need was [...] for suppleness of the public administration, from the point of view of the division of certain tasks, with a view to reduce the number of staff and so on.”

In support of the arguments of his preceding interviewee, it is important to highlight that the same was asserted by respondent P6:

“This [first reform of 2019] has been achieved on the premise of changing a heavy ministry and contoured by the idea of having a “supple” government.”

According to Janssen and Estevez (2013), the concept of lean government represents an ever-emerging trend within the realm of digitalisation of the public sector. The authors regard its apparition as an answer to established strategies, including eGovernment, subsequently striving to streamline and improve the structures and procedures of organisations within the governmental domain with the goal to reduce extra layers, while also fostering innovation (Janssen and Estevez 2013). Miller’s arguments (2009) are backing up this view, as he argues that the idea of lean or supple government emphasises the continual enhancing of the delivery of services by eliminating inconsistencies and ineffectiveness of existing procedures.

Moreover, with regards to the former ministries who dealt with the digitalisation component, Hristea (2018) contended that the establishment of a relevant body of skilled professionals and the storage of some level of in-house expertise as to successfully carry out the recommendations put forward by European institutions and other financing entities could have prompted the achievement of the specific digital-related goals. According to P1, P2 and P6, the same vision was somehow followed in the creation of this authority. Consequently, respondent P6 asserted that the National Liberal Party’s (*to which the former PM belonged*) governing programme envisioned the placement of private sector expert knowledge at the forefront of public initiatives, since the government alone would have been unable to develop appropriate policies for the domain of digitalisation.

Furthermore, four of the eight interviewees – respectively, P3, P6, P7 and P8 – deemed that the substitution of the former components of the now abolished ministry with this recently established entity known as the “Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania” and placing it under the Prime Minister was an excellent strategy of bringing the issue of digitalisation at the forefront of the public sector. As P3 contended:

“[...] I was one of the supporters of coordination of the topic of digitalisation at the centre of the government. More precisely, a strong political leadership, for example, the Prime Minister, would have been the best to coordinate these efforts in our type of administration, with the additional help of a very strong technical leadership. ADR could have taken over this role.”

Therefore, the majority of respondents argued that the establishment of ADR and its positioning under the Prime Minister represented an advantageous remodelling of the digital capacities within the executive branches of government, with only respondent P1 claiming that another emerging reason for ADR’s creation could have potentially been to “implement the provisions of the NRRP”. However, the topic of NRRP provisions as a means of

internalised technical pressure exerted in the rationales of reform will only be addressed later within this section.

Conversely, when inquired about the later reformation of December 2020, consisting of the creation of the Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation, a number of insightful and valuable comments on its establishment emerged. Therefore, the majority of those interviewed shared the belief that the newly organised Ministry turned the positive course of ADR into an adverse one and encouraged the institutions in charge of digitalisation to completely resume everything from scratch. Therefore, P3 claimed that:

“The emergence of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation as an institution involved in this area, in my opinion, has ruined this architecture and has also ruined the dynamics of digitalisation.”

Moreover, P6 contended that:

“The institution [ADR] started to catch momentum, because during the pandemic it did relatively good things, as it contributed to some emergency management situations. In principle, the idea was to give this institution a badge and power from the Prime Minister. Here is, in fact, the key factor or the supreme discussion on digitalisation in Romania. If the Prime Minister does not politically give a force to a digitalisation project, any Minister or Head of Agency has zero chance to do anything, because they instantly come into direct conflict with the [other ministries] [...] which also have their own components. Nobody wants to share data.”

However, before delving into further assessment depths, it is important to indicate that the issue of data sharing and transparency within the inter and intra institutional realms of the Romanian Government will be thoroughly dealt with in the *Discussions* section.

As a result, many of the respondents portrayed a positive attitude towards the approach of concentrating digitalisation at the centre of the government policy and rendered it as an efficient strategy. Furthermore, P3, P6, P7, and P8 contended that this system of things was disrupted by the intention to reassign digitalisation to a ministry. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in accordance with Article 1, para. 1 of the Governmental Emergency Ordinance no. 90/2019, the now Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Communications transferred all its responsibilities, roles, and personnel of the Intermediate Body for the Promotion of Information Society along with the ones of the Project Implementation Unit to the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, which was, back then, still operating under the coordination of the Prime Minister (Romanian Government 2019b). What was formerly known as the Intermediate Body for the Promotion of the Information Society is now a General Directorate, as depicted within section A of the *Appendix*, whereas the Implementation Unit is structured and operates as a unit without legal personality, and it should be regarded as different from the organisational structure of the authority (Romanian Government 2020b).

Therefore, along with the aforementioned structures, the human resource who was working under the umbrella of the former ministries' units were, at that point, transferred to the newly founded Authority for Digitalisation. This is a very important remark to be made before delving into the reasons behind the reconstruction of the ministry, as P7 contended that the former ministry:

"[...] was a tree in the shade of which nothing grew. This was a specificity of the former ministry and could therefore also be valid for ADR [...]."

Thus, the results of the interviews indicate that the decision to re-establish a ministry designed for the domain of digitalisation and subordinate the newly formed authority comprising also of individuals from the previous abolished ministry was not centred on the enhancement of digitalisation as the most compelling justification for such changes, according to respondent P8. Moreover, the interviewee contended that:

"The proof that digitalisation was not the strongest argument for these changes is that after a few years, the Ministry of Digitalisation was re-established, merged with the Ministry of Research and Innovation, as we have it now, in which came the communications part from the Ministry of Transport, merged with the Ministry of Research. The Digitalisation Authority returned to the subordination of MRID, and was renamed as we know it now, ADR."

Additionally, the interplay between specialisation and coordination with regard to institutional settings is also purposefully emphasised within the specialised literature. Peters (2018) depicts specialisation as coordination's opposite, which constitutes one of the key causes for decline in policy coordination. Specialisation against coordination shapes one of the several contradictions which Herbert Simon (1947, as cited in Peters 2018) contended that the majority of change in the public domain was oscillating between when it comes to desirable standards (Bouckaert et al. 2010; Peters 2018). Therefore, it may be inferred that improving coordination should be a prerogative that is to be achieved before specialisation. However, respondents generally agreed that coordination was better achieved at the centre of the government. This has been furthermore enhanced by interviewee P3, who has subsequently provided a valuable illustration:

"I want to give another example: that of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and of the Ministry of Finance. Regardless of the MRID or ADR, these formerly mentioned ministries have their own information-sharing protocols that developed over time. They were made on a technical level, but they were based on the confidence that both ministries have the mechanisms in place to ensure they do not misuse what they take from each other. It was more of a "gentleman's agreement" rather than a big institutional set-up ethic. ADR cannot intervene in the relationships between ministries from its current placement; it cannot be a "middleman" and take over the relationship of trust. From the centre of the government, as it was initially placed, it could have indeed brought others around this relationship of trust, [...] but in a vertical coordination, as the current one, the ministry would have to place itself, with ADR in its subordination, and tell these two formerly mentioned ministries: "What you are doing is ok, but you also need to bring others". Then, of course, the ministries would not understand what the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation and ADR have to do within their business, as they have made the

consortium reliable only for that service that the two of them use and do not see it as their responsibility to bring other stakeholders in. This is the reality. I do not know how much people can see it from the outside, but from inside the government, this stuff can be seen very well.”

The respondents also provided insightful comments on the effects that this recent restructuring had on the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania and the Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation, respectively. Subsequently, three of the eight respondents claimed that even within this novel structural reorganisation of capabilities, there is a distinguished misperception of an institution’s own capabilities, which resulted in an initial duplication of their roles and attributions. As assessed by respondent P8:

“Instead, when moving digitalisation under one Ministry, it can be seen that no plan was made or that the plan was not carried out to the very end, because for a period of time the attributions of the ministry and ADR overlapped. When the former ministry was abolished and ADR was placed at the centre of the Government, then ADR got all the attributions of the former ministry in the field of IT and digitalisation. When they were put back under the Ministry, the attributions remained, but the same attributions have been undertaken by the newly re-established ministry. Thus, the attributions doubled, including on the side of policies, strategies. [...] However, normally, the ministry should be the one in charge of the policy and strategy side, and the ADR should be the one implementing strategies or policies and operating information systems of national importance. At first it was a mix, but maybe starting with last year, the situation started shifting into a clearer state, from my point of view.”

Following that line of argumentation, one has to investigate further into the motivations behind the creation of the Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation and the rationale for ADR’s subordination to it. Interviewee P3 provided more insight into this matter, by arguing that the political environment had a strong influence on the decision to reinstate a coordinating ministry in relation to digitalisation:

“[...] the political context was as follows. The proposal to re-establish the ministry or to receive this component was brought by those from the USR [Save Romania Union political party] into the right-wing coalition that came in 2019, if I am not mistaken. [...] They proposed it with the thought that through the future NRRP, whose subject they knew very well, and through the ministry set up by them... So, they knew that the subject would be there, and then they said, they had to deal with this subject and set up this ministry to coordinate. So, somehow, it was that ideal mix between “We know some money is coming” – so European pressure, somehow, and “We know we will also have power there that we need to distribute”. Because there is no other argument for this component of digitalisation to not be taken to the centre of government, or not being left as the ADR was then, with increased powers. ADR had full force back then. Those were, I think, the arguments.”

Moreover, respondent’s P8 arguments additionally strengthened his predecessor’s claims:

“When I said that [digitalisation] has reached the centre of Government, maybe it also mattered the fact that, apart from the political context and apart from political reasons, people have also started to admit the importance of digitalisation. When things returned to the way they were before [e.g., the creation of a Ministry to coordinate digitalisation], I think it was just a political decision.”

Despite this, most efficiency-related arguments fall short in the face of the power struggles over resource allocation uncovered by all eight respondents. Moreover, three out of the eight interviewees expressed that the Governmental Decree establishing the functioning and organisation of the newly formed Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation appeared a few months after the Emergency Ordinance. According to Article 37, para. 1, of the 4th Section of the Administrative Code of 3rd of July 2019, integral part of the Emergency Ordinance 57/2019 (Romanian Government 2019c), the Government enacts decrees and ordinances as part of the exercise of its authority. Moreover, decisions are drawn up to coordinate the enforcement of legislation (Romanian Government 2019c).

Within the perusal of the online available documents regarding this new rearrangement, it has been indeed observed that the Governmental Decree no. 371 regarding the organisation and operation of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation was published in the Official Gazette on the 1st of April 2021. This comes indeed exactly three months after the publication in the Official Gazette of the Governmental Emergency Ordinance no. 212 on 28th of December 2020, which stipulated the creation of the newly formed ministry and the shift of the Authority for Digitalisation from the coordination of the Prime-Minister to the coordination of the Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation (Romanian Government 2021b).

Therefore, the decree that could have faster addressed the organisation and functioning of the novel Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation was delayed by three months after its institutional establishment. Moreover, two of the respondents emphasised that this is why they fail to recognise this latter reform as a way to improve the performance or capacity within the realm of eGovernment. Instead, the interviewees claimed they perceive this institutional re-establishment as an expression of the lack of importance that the political decision-makers actually granted to the topic of digitalisation. Therefore, this made most of them claim that digitalisation was, indeed, not more than a political declarative priority.

Notwithstanding the respondents' claims related to the political figures' double-talking, clear rationales for the reform which re-established a coordinating ministry for digitalisation must be derived. Therefore, according to the previous assertions of respondent P3, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan instruments might have steered the motivations for reform. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan was underscored by 7 out of 8 interviewees as an engine for enhancing the digital sector, in general. However, each respondent has different reasons behind these claims. As previously highlighted, respondent P3 argued that NRRP could have potentially been exploited as a

justification to control resource allocation and establish the MRID as a controller of digital transformation. Moreover, these claims seem to have been additionally strengthened by interviewee P2, who assessed that:

“Placing it [ADR] under MRID seems to me to be nothing more than a political move, driven by the need to control the funds coming through NRRP and operational programmes. This is because MRID is rather concerned with the research and development area, the competencies in the digitalisation area remain at ADR. In my opinion at least, I do not identify any technical rationale related to any efficiency and effectiveness.”

However, NRRP was not only regarded as a *cash cow*, but also as a factor of EU related technical pressures that might have steered the government into transferring digital transformation from a declarative state to an operational one. The concern of failing to meet NRRP targets was therefore identified as a key factor in the enhancement of the former governmental structures with regard to the integration of digital capabilities, according to P1, P2, P3, P7, and P8. As assessed by respondent P1:

“With this mechanism of NRRP, things have begun to be taken much more seriously by institutions on what this aspect of digitalisation means, and it is therefore no longer just a fashionable word within public discussions.”

The same remarks were underscored by respondent P3:

“And then, it was again the pressure component, because they had NRRP and they must have done something to clarify the role of MRID and its attributions, because otherwise I think it could have taken even longer than 3 months [for the Governmental Decree establishing its functioning to be published]. So somehow it was exactly the ideal mix that ruined, in my opinion, the trajectory that the ADR had taken.”

However, interviewees P3 and P4 asserted that this drive to accomplish the milestones was additionally motivated by a political apprehension of jeopardising significant financial resources supplied through the NRRP financial instrument, as opposed to a real ambition to accomplish the digital objectives:

“For example: the famous NRRP. The fear of not meeting milestones, of causing political harm, makes things happen. [...] politically, European funds are a very powerful instrument.” (as per respondent P3)

“[...] there were funds coming from the European Union through NRRP that kept this desire alive. [...] So, you basically had these funds that had to be put into something, because part of them were dedicated to digitalisation which did not really exist, so there was no other way... Romania could not get this money from anywhere else, and Romania will not ever have the money to do that [digitalisation] by itself. And that came with some milestones, some requirements, and so on. And somehow it also came as part of the EU's strategy regarding the green transition, but not so much. [...] it was about the fact that there was money dedicated to that. Romania alone would have done nothing.” (as per respondent P4)

However, a first inference that may be drawn from previous assessments is that the Romanian Government attempted to establish a broad framework of digital capacity

allocations inside the Government, resulting primarily from an external tension internalised within technical pressures, and nuanced by the polity features of autochthonous administration. This has been underlined throughout all eight interviews, which focused on the legislative pressure and requirements from the European Union, the domestic concern over infringements and contraventions – which come at a financial expense – and the overall necessity of adhering to the external market demands. As P1 comprehensively summarised it:

“There is clearly a pressure from a legislative point of view or, better said, regarding what Romania’s commitments mean, regarding what our participation as a Member State at the level of the European Union means.”

As a corollary, the majority of the interviewees assessed that these two structural reforms may have in fact aimed to increase the legitimacy of the government in relation to its fostering and advertisement of digital transformation, and thus there might be a chance that Romania’s governmental reconfigurations have indeed moved the political discourse on digitalisation from a declarative position to a more tangible one. According to interviews P2, P3, P4, and P6, Sebastian Burduja, the previous Minister of Research, Innovation, and Digitalisation, did make an attempt to propel existing processes and spark the digital transition. Conversely, in terms of the proportion of the accomplished outcomes of these reorganisations, the majority of respondents were hesitant.

However, it seems that still, a highly important stake behind prioritising the topic of digitalisation within the last three years might again be related to EU funding opportunities via the NRRP instruments, which connects different domain milestones in its grant tranches, according to respondent P8, who claimed that:

“Digitalisation has indeed been a more tangible priority in the last 3 years than in previous years, so it is not just declarative anymore. Indeed, it has been seen that emphasis is being placed on it and it can be admitted that this area is supported. Under NRRP, investments are linked. In the sense that the European Commission grants tranches of aid only if all milestones, all investments related to a payment request are carried out. And then, for instance, we complete a highway in vain if we do not digitalise an institution. That is just an example. We do not receive the money related to that tranche. Therefore, digitalisation is usually hung up on other visible and important infrastructure investments for politicians, such as highways.”

Considering the aforementioned, how much of this structural reform was driven by institutional pressures and thus influenced by EU developments, myths, or trends is rather irresolute. After aggregating the main codes and themes imprinted within the interviewees’ discourses, it is observable that the technical pressures and rash decisions, ingrained in the webs of organisational culture and darker polity facets were the main engines for structural transformation. In sum, this implies that the rising demands and regulatory pressures of the EU market, along with ensuing monetary assistance, which additionally steered an accentuated desire of political power over resource allocation,

drove this reform. This translates to the Romanian necessity to seek greater rearrangement of priorities and engrain a rather cultural shift from seeing digitalisation as a fashionable buzzword, often employed in double-talking, to something much more measurable. However, how much of this has been achieved throughout the already existing arrangements and how the performance of the current organisation of digitalisation-related capacities is perceived will be thoroughly addressed in the *Discussions* section.

6 Discussions

As stated within the boundaries of the *Results* chapter, the interviews have not only been useful in obtaining responses to the selected research question but have additionally helped uncover additional cultural and polity characteristics that shape the landscape of the Romanian Government. Their inclusion in the *Discussion* section is of utmost importance since these subsequent factors may reveal a plethora of additional variables that have an impact on the governmental institutions' performance in the realm of digital transformation, regardless of organisational or structural choices.

Therefore, one of the first issues that have been addressed in connection to this reorganisation of institutions was that of transition of the human resource of the former Ministry of Communications and Information Society into the – back then – newly formed Authority of Digitalisation. Taking into consideration the prevailing arguments addressing the inefficiency of the former ministerial organisations present in both the interviews and specialised literature (Hristea 2018; Ifimiei 2021; Nicoară 2018), it is probable that this transformation might have been more effective if the personnel allocations would have undergone a deeper rearrangement and redesign. This is furthermore strengthened by the argument additionally expressed by Catrina (2018), who contended that in the case of Romania, it is necessary to approach digital transformation through an integrated perspective that considers every factor within the administrative climate. Therefore, according to her assessments, “*in Romania, digital transformation is about change, not about technology*” (Catrina 2018, p. 191), and additionally consists of a shift in people, practices, guidelines, and overall, the re-hierarchisation of guiding principles and values.

However, the issue of transforming current mentalities has been constantly reminded throughout all the interviewee's responses. According to respondent P1, the average age in public administration, which is “*over 45 years old*”, makes it quite challenging to convince individual of novel ways of approaching PA that are currently deemed as popular or relevant within outer institutional settings. Moreover, respondent P2 contended that, despite several instruction programmes and boosted access to the European or global setting, there is still a lack of improvement in the public stakeholders' mindsets, expertise, or relationships with the notion of accountability. Therefore, seven out of the eight respondents did, to some extent, describe the unwillingness, lack of open mindfulness, and reluctance of the people working in the Romanian administrative system to change.

The previous assertions are thoroughly strengthened within the academic literature, having authors such as Stoica and Ghilic-Micu (2020), who contended that this is also connected to the lack of experience of the users of novel applications, which leads to the

need for greater training for government employees, which has been previously emphasised by both P1 and P2. Additionally, the elimination of red tape is subsequently regarded as a potential solution which might significantly enhance the effectiveness of eGovernment, but which would only become possible when links among institutions and units are established, and governmental stakeholders are given clear instructions on how to leverage on those (Stoica and Ghilic-Micu 2020).

The erratic relationship between the Romanian public administration's representatives and the concept of accountability has been additionally depicted within other respondents' discourse and has been therefore collapsed in multiple analytical facets. On the one hand, respondent P1 predicated on the fact that "*the political factor shows maximum irresponsibility regarding what it means to ensure a baseline of continuity of things*", which has subsequently been enhanced by interviewees P2, P3, P5, and P6. On the other hand, while respondent P1 links the issue of responsibility to the problem of sectoral coordination of digitalisation, P2, P3 and P5 contend that these silo or insular approaches are dictated by an apprehension of ministries to share data among themselves. However, the issues of intra and inter institutional trust and transparency will be dealt with a bit later on within the scope of this chapter.

According to P5, the previously mentioned lack of accountability might frequently be connected to the dearth of open mindfulness or salient resignation that reigns within the Romanian central administration setting:

"They do not have time for ideas, they do not feel like improving anything, they simply do not see the point of this stuff. They do not accept new ideas, even if that would mean improving citizens' lives."

Interviewees have contended that the games within the realm of Romanian central administration are usually implying various levels in which multiple institutions or political individuals are fighting for supreme power over resource distribution, as it has been previously mentioned in the *Results* chapter. Therefore, while three respondents have expressed that the administration prevails over the citizen, by being "*rather self-centred*" and thinking "*in terms of solving its own problems*" (as per respondent P3), all respondents have contended that sometimes, the administration is being prevailed in turn by politics. Moreover, respondent P3 asserted that:

"[...] the political factor and the desire to distribute resources prevail. I think that unfortunately the political part in administration limits itself there. I think that is what changed this institutional arrangement rather than a desire to streamline. Obviously, the political discourse is towards efficiency, towards digital public services, but practically, this is not happening, and this is reflected also in the DESI measurements."

As P1 plastically expressed, the nature of the Romanian public realm is “*two-headed*”, consisting of the administrative and the political components. Interviewee P5 further addressed the fact that everything within the government apparatus is controlled by a fight for dominance and authority.

However, this struggle for political influence leads to a wide range of inconsistencies in how the digitalisation sector is commanded and steered at the level of the Romanian Government. Seven out of the eight respondents acknowledged that, to a certain extent, the presence of significant discrepancy across government programmes and the fact that every newly launched one continues advancing and proposing the same ambitions and promises of the previous. Furthermore, interviewee P1 attributes a portion of the blame for both the historical and contemporary inefficiencies to politicians’ disregard to multiannual public policies. Additionally, the same respondent argued that there is a lack of political mobilisation within the organisations that must implement the policies, as well as a clear absence of comprehension among new governors of what the efforts of digital transformation financially imply for the institutions responsible for the implementation of digital services.

Additionally, as noted by respondent P3 and previously evaluated in the *Results* chapter, there is an inadequate level of understanding among institutions regarding their particular positions and duties within this entire exercise of digitalisation or digital transformation:

“Obviously, they know it by and large, and they have some laws that tell them exactly what they do, but on horizontal topics, such as digital transformation or digital public services, it is hard to say, for example: “The Ministry of Internal Affairs deals with digitalisation from here to here”. [...] They do not know exactly where the job of one ministry ends in terms of making available to other institutions [...] for example, information about people. Where does its liability end? The government should do this on a broader level, which is to define it: “You have the role from here to here, from here on out, the others are responsible”. There is not really a conversation about trust and accountability, and who is accountable.”

This inevitably brings up again the topic of an ingrained fear of accountability across institutions. Presumably, this absence of clearly defining what was represented by other interviewees as political ownership is the cause of this fear of responsibility. Moreover, such claims have also been supported within previous accounts of the literature, which depicted several reports in which Romanian Government employees displayed a reluctance to assume responsibility (Suwaj 2013). Consequently, the absence of political ownership, which was mentioned by five of the eight respondents, is another alternative aspect of this specific dread uncovered within the scope of this research. Respondent P6, who participated in an event addressing the first Romanian AI government adviser, provided a clear illustration of the variable of political ownership:

“Even at the last event I attended, they could not get him to say a simple phrase. But it is not about that. I remember the attitude of the government coming to a hearing in the IT Commission in which they were reprimanded because this "Ion" does not work. The government apologised and said that it is a civic, voluntary initiative in which not a cent of the government's money has been used. Folks, this is a joke. If we boast in the international press that Romania has the first Prime Minister's AI honorary advisor, people must also allocate resources! They had to politically take responsibility for this decision and allocate a budget. If I really believe that there is a scientific basis behind my project, I allocate money so that I can export it as a model. [...] But in Romania, especially in the area of digitalisation, people do not assume a political decision. And political decision means allocation of funds. That is what we are talking about.”

Whenever the topic of discussion reached the issue of „Ion”, an AI-powered advisor created to assist government officials comprehend Romanian citizens more effectively by swiftly analysing their views on important problems and policies (Khatsenkova 2023), most of the interviewees viewed it as an amusement and laughed it off. Others, however, stated that it was a project that was destined to fail from the very beginning, making it not much different from other autochthonous digitalisation endeavours.

However, according to respondent P7, public opinion holders despise criticism, even when it is supported by a detailed analysis of the factual realities:

“You cannot write a critique and make arguments, because you will be accused of having something against them, of undermining their authority, and so on. A practical proof for this [...]: after we hardly obtained the ADR to make measurements with regard to government services, the ADR desperately asked not to carry the measurements anymore, ADR asked not to have to praise or criticise other ministries. We asked for this to happen, we got it, and the ADR leadership just wanted to run away from this aspect. Why? It was a purely political attitude of the leadership, and that was a problem from my point of view.”

However, interview subjects viewed these political attitudes from various perspectives. While some of them regarded political attitudes as an escape from responsibility, others believed that these behaviours were the primary generators of what respondent P5 coined as a “toxic” administrative climate. Additionally, respondent P5 describes the administration's environment as the outcome of a number of variables that stem from the predominance of achieving own personal interests. Everything from the misappropriation of funds to the arbitrary ranking of redundant project initiatives and the “generalised secrets” that, according to P5, cover the individuals who execute the aforementioned projects, have been painted as crucial components of the larger institutional picture.

However, concerns over the spending of funds and other financial instruments have also been expressed by participant P6, which contends that the initiatives that are now wrapped up by the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania in order to meet previous objectives and set goals are no longer meeting the demands of current times:

“I personally am concerned about the way in which I observe the money translated into what is implemented. In ADR, there are dozens of projects catching up, of tens

of millions of euros, which are a few years old and will no longer have an impact. They are only implemented because they have to be paid and operationalised, but they do not follow a concrete strategy of the Authority or of the ministry to achieve some concrete national objectives. For example, the Governmental Cloud was a failed project from the beginning in my opinion. It is a project in which several hundred million are wasted on devices and equipment that will become obsolete anyway when we will reach implementation.”

Moreover, the element of intra and interinstitutional trust and transparency, on which five of the eight respondents shared multiple viewpoints, is another variable of particular relevance in the overall interplay between the political and the administrative dimensions. Additionally, this aspect is closely related to individuals’ egos, which might in return give rise to certain institutional egos. According to P5, “*there was also animosity between ministries*”. Moreover, the same respondent has contended that one “*had to get over personal egos and [...] get people to collaborate*”. These claims have been furthermore strengthened by respondent P4, who has admitted that, sometimes “*out of pride, there is not a lot of communication*”. Moreover, the need for functional communication has additionally been underscored by respondent P1.

Therefore, the collaboration between institutions has been hampered across the years by a variety of factors which led to individuality of institutional behaviours and a lack of openness towards collaboration and transparency, as expressed by P1, P2, P3, and P5. Moreover, the issues of institutional collaboration have also been previously expressed in The Case of Romania chapter, using the assessment of the European Commission, which posited that each institution is oftentimes concentrated on their particular e-service, which consequently give raise to uncertainties about the amount of data supplied which is subsequently used by other institutions in return (European Commission 2019).

However, this lack of openness could not be generalised as a variable conditioned by the political colour of the institutions, as P4 asserted that “*there is not a lot of inter-Ministerial communication, even when it comes to Ministries led by the same political party*”. Moreover, participant P3 somehow tried to convey the idea that this layer of trust needs to be tackled from a regulatory standpoint as well, which was, in a subtle manner, addressed by respondent P5 too:

“Chaos is beneficial to those who have information. If all things were organised and open, you would become replaceable. Conversely, if you have a chaos in which only you know the organisation of stuff, you will be irreplaceable. If you have impeccable management, with very well-done information organisation, you can be changed at any time. Basically, it is a controlled chaos system.

And I will tell you one more thing: people were gathering the data, but they did not admit they had it. Whenever a request came, boom, the data would appear. That is one thing I admired about the Romanian administration: those people who gathered the indicators and worked with them were extraordinarily thorough to cover as many cases as possible. I am sure of that.”

As a consequence, it is implied that the improper measurement of indicators, which was also illustrated in the *Results* chapter, is a strategy for ensuring that the disorder is somehow managed from inside and that subjective interests are achieved in a successful way. Furthermore, it would seem that data gathering builds on the virtue of irreplaceability. However, to construct on respondent's P5 claims, those who collect the data do not seem interested in organising it in a manner in which a potential successor of one's role or position may utilise it, to further protect their own placement at the larger table of central administration.

In all these clashes of power and disputes over resource distribution, the vanquished is embodied by the general citizenry. P8's response, which asserts that the majority of the existing e-services lack a satisfaction questionnaire, further demonstrates the governors' disregard the needs of the people within their struggles over power. It may be assumed that the general public's viewpoint would then be undesirable or even discarded. In light of the aforementioned, P8 argued that:

"We need to move from the thinking that "We need to go from digitalisation because we have money to spend" to "We need administrative reform for institutions to function better in the mission they have and, in the services, they provide to citizens"."

It appears that the characteristics of the domestic government identified throughout the interviews are various, and firmly rooted in the current processes or strategies employed in the field of digitalisation. The responses, however, were diverse when it came to whether organisational culture existed at the level of the two recently established institutions. While interviewee P6 contended that what is actually lacking at the administrative level of these bodies is precisely this organisational culture, respondent P7 asserted that the analysis of the cultural facet should commence from the level of individuals, who can be separated based on the stakes they employ when assuming their position. Therefore, this division created by interviewee P7 contrasts the stakeholders who try to steer and improve the current circumstances from those who address their personal stakes before anything.

Moreover, P7 asserted that each institution has its own organisational culture, which differs from one another. Since MRID *"does not have specialised people in its own body and everything that happened during Burduja's mandate happened through cabinet people and only 5-6 other people from the taskforce who wanted to work"*, he claims that it lacks a definite culture. However, according to him, ADR has adopted numerous aspects of the previous MCIS culture, including this bully behaviour that recalls the aforementioned struggle for supremacy and power:

“This was a specificity of the former ministry, and could therefore also be valid for ADR, it is also valid for the former CERT-RO [Romanian National Computer Emergency Readiness Team]. I have seen this with my own eyes. They would treat them like: “Hey, who do you think you are? We will take care of you so that you understand who is the boss”. Even when it came to simple things or requests. There was no aggressive attitude in the CERT [Romanian National Computer Emergency Readiness Team] area because there was a Steering Committee in which several institutions were comprised, and the ministry was a coordinator.”

Therefore, political, cultural, and environmental pressures all have a simultaneous impact on the decision-making realm in the Romanian context of institutional transformation. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that the pressures of technical nature, commencing with the requirements to adhere to the regulations and align with the norms imposed by the EU, have been identified as some of the main reasons for the most recent digital capacities rearrangements within government from November 2019 – December 2020.

The design of the reform, however, was influenced by the polity traits of the domestic administration as well as by cultural features that were ingrained from earlier dysfunctional organisations, and not only. Nevertheless, the change was mostly motivated by political power struggles, the need to protect the sources of funding provided through EU mechanisms, and declaratory statements on the improvement on the current state of digitalisation. As a consequence, the reform’s decision-making tends to be about building a shape without filling it with substance, but it nonetheless helps ensure what P5 deemed as *“the circumstantial survival of the state”*.

7 Conclusion

Reporting what has been discovered in a comprehensive conclusion section is a key phase in developing the overall significance of an academic paper, since it includes the findings of the investigation and provides information on suggestions for future work and novel fields of study. The topic of rationales for the structural reorganisation of institutions necessitates going beyond the expansive and poorly defined confines of the public realm and into more secluded bounds of specific reform instances, as was stressed during multiple instances of this master's thesis. Therefore, before delving into further assertions, it is important to re-posit the main aim of this thesis, which was that of **unfolding the underlying factors driving the Romanian Government's decision to pursue the institutional reforms of November 2019–December 2020, associated with the new structural model of digital policy coordination and implementation.**

In order to answer the main RQ, a qualitative investigation of the historical narrative of previous institutional reforms, along with the operationalisation of a thorough conceptual framework developed by Christensen and Læg Reid (2016) have been triangulated with the empirical results from a set of eight expert interviews. Consequently, an assessment of three core variables in accordance with the transformational perspective on reform has been implemented, as *environmental*, *cultural*, and *polity* indicators should be used and assessed complementarily as explanations for how reform processes evolve. Therefore, the execution of the formerly mentioned steps aided in achieving the main aim of this thesis, which was that of exploring the unmapped area of rationales behind the most recent digital-capacity reconfigurations within the Romanian Government.

As formerly underlined within the *Introduction* chapter, the first sub-question addressed the stakeholders' views on the institutional reforms under scrutiny. Therefore, most respondents showed dissatisfaction with regard to the current institutional arrangement, which was oftentimes classified as a political decision. Moreover, this is due to the fact that, as illustrated within both the *Results* and *Discussions* sections, the first institutional reform of 2019, which placed ADR at the centre of the government, was – based on the interviewees' expertise and assertions – the best setting in which a horizontal topic, such as digitalisation, can be dealt with at the government level.

Moreover, the second sub-question addressed the stakeholders' views on the rationales behind the assessed rearrangements. While some of the respondents have partially attributed the motives behind these institutional reforms as a desiderate to align with EU norms and values and assessed that they might have been potentially inspired by other institutional arrangements of foreign governments in terms of digital policy coordination, such statements were in minority. However, the prevalent reason behind the urge to

streamline digital transformation might instead have been steered by a need to comply with EU regulations, driven by a fear of infringement. This claim was furthermore strengthened by all subjects, and additionally connected with the argument that the administration was already carrying the financial burden caused by institutional deficiencies of previous arrangements and siloed initiatives. When inquired about the reform which established MRID, most of the respondents asserted that political decisions, such as the aim to create more ministerial portfolios – which could, according to their claims, ensure the supremacy of power over resource distribution and allocation of EU funding – prevailed in front of the argument of efficiency.

Nonetheless, the last sub-question inquired about what the prospects of digital transformation within the Romanian administration could be, given the results. In accordance with Christensen and Lægread's (2016) view on the variables which have been previously operationalised within this thesis, the environmental, polity and cultural blocks are of utter importance in depicting not only the rationales for reform, but also the degree of success for the novel configurations. However, most of the polity and cultural features which have been depicted within the scope of the interviews, and within previous scholarly assessments, reflect the need of domestic administration to overcome its current systems of operating. This is because, most of the times, in the lack of a thorough push from behind on behalf of higher-positioned external players, autochthonous digital initiatives lack substance, as they tend to emerge from siloed thinking and insular approaches.

Therefore, technical pressures, nuanced by the multifarious facets of cultural and administrative factors of the current executive setting, were depicted as the main reasons for all these institutional changes. However, the lack of a unified and clear strategy regarding Romania's digital future can bring a plethora of adjacent issues to the already existing predicament of the current digital sector. More than that, the political instability that prevails in the executive realm, as previously assessed, and further portrayed within the section C of the Appendices, makes the insemination of consistent and congruent values a difficult task. However, the dense and almost impenetrable bureaucratic circuit, depicted by the investigated features of the Romanian administrative setting limits further prospectives to change, unless motivated by internalised technical pressures, which often stem from the EU Member status.

7.1 Limitations and Future Research

Reaching saturation is perceived as something which gives academics the assurance of knowing they have gathered all the data they need to fully address the issues they are investigating (Bryman 2012; Creswell and Plano Clark 2018), both in terms of magnitude

and complexity. Moreover, Bryman (2012) underscores that this guarantees that the results they arrive at are supported by a thorough examination of the facts and are not only dependent on shallow observations. Therefore, the thesis's ability to respond to the need for saturation might be a vulnerable circumstance given that only eight interviews have been carried out for the purpose of this study. However, this limitation was partially offset by only engaging with highly qualified professionals who had deep understanding and expertise within the topic of Romanian PA and eGovernment, and who were, at certain points in time, connected to the assessed institutions. Moreover, the average experience of the respondents within the area of digitalisation in the Romanian public sector was calculated to be of approximately 11 years. This furthermore demonstrates that the selection of interviewees has been made with a view to obtaining only relevant and informed knowledge on the underlying reasons for the reforms under scrutiny.

However, Guest et al. (2006, as cited in Bryman 2012) pitched the number of twelve interview participants as the optimal size sample. Therefore, in order to potentially gather more respondents for the assessment, a Google Form with the open-ended questions provided in the Interview Guide, as shown in section E of the Appendices, was created and shared with a number of potential interviewees. This was undertaken in an effort to give prospective participants a preview of the interview queries and to also collect their written input in the event that their schedules could not accommodate an online meeting. However, the form did not garner a sufficient volume of relevant replies, and a number of those who provided responses via the form subsequently agreed to additionally attend a meeting, in order to assist with clarifying any answers and respond to subsequent follow-up questions. Consequently, the Google Form's findings have not been included in the corpus of the analysis. Nevertheless, an earlier version of the form responses will be preserved in case an opportunity to perform further research on this subject materialises.

The lack of academic literature on the topic of Romanian digitalisation and reforms represented an additional limitation of this study. It goes without saying that the subject of this thesis has not been an explicit scholarly concern, which proved to be both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, triangulating the appropriate resources to support the subsequent coding schemes demonstrated to be a challenging process, given the scarcity of relevant academic resources concentrated on the Romanian climate. On the other hand, this presents an opportunity for this thesis to add to the existing literature by attempting to integrate both the topics of institutional reform and digitalisation capacities, with a focus on domestic settings.

However, considering the scope and richness of the Romanian digital-coordination reforms as a research topic, future inquiry angles must consider that this thesis is merely a beginning step in the construction of more comprehensive academic works. As a result, this thesis introduces a number of topics which call for further research since there is either a scarcity of available knowledge or an utter lack of it. Therefore, one of the first subjects that requires additional thought is examining the multitude of reforms in the field of digital capacities across a longer time span than the one selected for the purpose of this thesis. Another topic that may be pertinent and helpful in the assessment of future structural modifications, is related to the various aspects of the cultural environment inside institutions in charge of digitalisation and the extent to which these cultural traits are passed down from earlier institutional configurations.

Given the brief period of only four years since these reforms, additional topics that should be further investigated include potential repercussions and implications of the current institutional setup. Moreover, an examination of the political discourse on the subject of digitalisation over time would be an intriguing angle, given the nature of political instability and discontinuity at the level of executive leadership (as depicted in section C of the Appendices). Therefore, a discourse analysis of political statements, contrasted with a measurement of the state of art digitalisation could potentially aid in revealing more about the complex webs that reside behind digital decision-making in the Romanian administrative climate.

References

- Abutabenjeh, S., and Jaradat, R. 2018. "Clarification of Research Design, Research Methods, and Research Methodology: A Guide for Public Administration Researchers and Practitioners," *Teaching Public Administration* (36:3), SAGE Publications Inc., pp. 237–258. (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0144739418775787/FORMAT/EPUB>).
- Aghion, P. 2006. "On Institutions and Growth," in *Institutions, Development, and Economic Growth*, T. S. Eicher and C. García-Peñalosa (eds.), The MIT Press, pp. 3–31. (http://direct.mit.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/171677/9780262272223_caa.pdf).
- Ahmady, G. A., Mehrpour, M., and Nikooravesh, A. 2016. "Organizational Structure," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* (230), pp. 455–462. (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.09.057>).
- Alesina, A., Ardagna, S., and Trebbi, F. 2006. "Who Adjusts and When? The Political Economy of Reforms," *IMF Staff Papers* (53:Special Issue).
- Alexandru, D. G., and Guziejewska, B. 2020. "Administrative Capacity as a Constraint to Fiscal Decentralization the Case of Romania and Poland," *Comparative Economic Research* (23:1), E-flow Sciendo, pp. 127–144. (<https://doi.org/10.18778/1508-2008.23.08>).
- Antonescu, D., Florescu, I. C., and Platon, V. 2022. "The Relation between Digitalization and Regional Development in Romania," *Central European Journal of Geography and Sustainable Development* (4:2), pp. 64–77. (<https://doi.org/10.47246/CEJGSD.2022.4.2.4>).
- ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH. (n.d.). "ATLAS.Ti," *ATLAS.Ti*. (<https://atlasti.com/>, accessed July 10, 2023).
- Babbie, E. 2010. *The Practice of Social Research*, (12th ed.), Belmont: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
- Băițan, A. (ed.). 2018. "Raport de Țară Pentru România Privind Indicele Economiei Și Societății Digitale (DESI) Pentru Anul 2018 (Country Report for Romania Regarding the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) for the Year 2018)," in *Caiet Documentar 3. România Digitală. Concepte Și Instrumente Operaționale (Documentary Notebook 3. Digital Romania. Concepts and Operational Tools)* (Vol. 3), București: Club România, pp. 137–145.
- Bannister, F., and Connolly, R. 2014. "ICT, Public Values and Transformative Government: A Framework and Programme for Research," *Government Information Quarterly* (31:1), Elsevier Ltd, pp. 119–128. (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2013.06.002>).
- Barrios-Suvelza, F. X. 2012. "Structural and Textural Dimensions of Territorial State Organisation," *Local Government Studies* (38:6), pp. 841–865. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2012.683862>).
- Basu, S. 2004. "E-government and Developing Countries: An Overview," *International Review of Law, Computers & Technology* (18:1), Informa UK Limited, pp. 109–132. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/13600860410001674779>).
- Bibby, A. S. 2016. *Montesquieu's Political Economy*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bouckaert, G., Peters, B. G., and Verhoest, K. 2010. "Coordination: What Is It and Why Should We Have It?," in *The Coordination of Public Sector Organizations*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 13–33.
- Braams, R. B., Wesseling, J. H., Meijer, A. J., and Hekkert, M. P. 2021. "Legitimizing Transformative Government: Aligning Essential Government Tasks from Transition Literature with Normative Arguments about Legitimacy from Public Administration Traditions," *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* (39), Elsevier B.V., pp. 191–205. (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2021.04.004>).
- Brinkmann, S. 2020. "Unstructured and Semistructured Interviewing," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.), P. Leavy (ed.), Oxford University Press, pp. 424–456. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.001.0001>).
- Bryant, A. 2020. "The Grounded Theory Method," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.), P. Leavy (ed.), Oxford University Press, pp. 167–199. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.001.0001>).
- Bryman, A. 2012. *Social Research Methods*, (4th ed.), New York: Oxford University Press.
- Catrina, M. 2018. "Transformarea Digitală a Statului (The Digital Transformation of the State)," in *Caiet Documentar 3. România Digitală. Concepte Și Instrumente Operaționale (Documentary Notebook 3. Digital Romania. Concepts and Operational Tools)* (Vol. 3), A. Băițan (ed.), București: Club România, pp. 169–195.
- Christensen, T., and Læg Reid, P. 2016. "A Transformative Perspective," in *Theory and Practice of Public Sector Reform* (1st ed.), S. Van de Walle and S. Groeneveld (eds.), Routledge.
- Clarivate. (n.d.). "Web of Science Platform," *Clarivate*. (<https://clarivate.com/products/scientific-and-academic-research/research-discovery-and-workflow-solutions/webofscience-platform/>, accessed May 31, 2023).

- Cloutier, C., Denis, J. L., Langley, A., and Lamothe, L. 2016. "Agency at the Managerial Interface: Public Sector Reform as Institutional Work," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (26:2), Oxford University Press, pp. 259–276. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muv009>).
- Constitution of Romania*. 1991. (https://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site2015.page?den=act2_2&par1=0&idl=2).
- Cotovelea, R. 2018. "Agenda Digitală Pentru România 2020. Analiză Comparativă a Strategiei Comunitare Din Perspectiva Strategiei Naționale (Digital Agenda for Romania 2020. Comparative Analysis of the Community Strategy from the Perspective of the National Strategy)," in *Caiet Documentar 3. România Digitală. Concepte Și Instrumente Operaționale (Documentary Notebook 3. Digital Romania. Concepts and Operational Tools)* (Vol. 3), A. Băițan (ed.), București: Club România, pp. 87–112.
- Creswell, J. W. 2009. *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (3rd ed.), SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., and Plano Clark, V. L. 2018. *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, (3rd ed.), SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Crowson, R. L., and Deal, T. E. 2020. "Microlevel Sources of Institutional Change: New Insights Into the Legitimacy Imperative," *Peabody Journal of Education* (95:4), pp. 439–448. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2020.1800178>).
- Dawes, S. S. 2008. "The Evolution and Continuing Challenges of E-Governance," *Public Administration Review* (68:1), pp. 86–102. (<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2008.00981.x>).
- Denis, J.-L., Lamothe, L., Langley, A., Breton, M., Gervais, J., Trottier, L.-H., Contandriopoulos, D., and Dubois, C.-A. 2009. "The Reciprocal Dynamics of Organizing and Sense-Making in the Implementation of Major Public-Sector Reforms," *Canadian Public Administration* (52:2), pp. 225–248.
- "Despre Agenția Pentru Agenda Digitală a României (About the Digital Agenda Agency of Romania)." 2016. *Revista de Achiziții Publice (Public Procurement Magazine)*. (<https://www.revista-achizitiilor.ro/index.php/despre-agentia-pentru-agenda-digitala-a-romaniei>).
- Dimaggio, P. J., and Powell, W. W. 1983. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review*, (48:2), American Sociological Review, pp. 147–160.
- Egeberg, M. 2013. "Chapter 9: How Bureaucratic Structure Matters: An Organizational Perspective," in *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*, Peters B Guy Pierre Jon (ed.), London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 157–168. (<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446200506>).
- Elgie, R. 2004. "Semi-Presidentialism: Concepts, Consequences and Contesting Explanations," *Political Studies Review* (2:3), pp. 314–330. (<http://webpages.dcu.ie/~elgie/index.htm>).
- Elsevier, M. Ltd. (n.d.). "Mendeley," <https://www.Mendeley.Com/Search/>.
- El-Taliawi, O. G., and Van Der Wal, Z. 2019. "Developing Administrative Capacity: An Agenda for Research and Practice," *Policy Design and Practice* (2:3), UBM Exhibition Singapore PTE LTD, pp. 243–257. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2019.1595916>).
- European Commission. 2016a. "Europe's Digital Progress Report (EDPR) 2016. Romania." (<http://www.comunicatii.gov.ro/proiectul-ecom/>).
- European Commission. 2016b. "Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2016. Country Report: Romania." (<http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/digital-agenda->).
- European Commission. 2017a. "Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2017. Country Report: Romania."
- European Commission. 2017b. "Europe's Digital Progress Report (EDPR) 2017. Country Profile: Romania."
- European Commission. 2018. "Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2018. Country Report: Romania." (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single->).
- European Commission. 2019. "Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2019. Country Report: Romania." (<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single->).
- European Commission. 2020. "Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2020. Country Report: Romania." (<https://www.comunicatii.gov.ro/agenda-digitala-pentru-romania-2020/>).
- European Commission. 2021. "Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2021. Country Report: Romania." (https://gov.ro/fisiere/programe_fisiere/Planul_Na%C8%9Bional_de_Investi%C8%9Bii_%C8%99i_Relansare_Ec).
- European Commission. 2022. "Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2022. Country Report: Romania."

- European Parliament. (n.d.). "Digital Agenda for Europe," *The European Parliament's Official Website*. (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/64/digital-agenda-for-europe>, accessed May 4, 2023).
- Fountain, J. E. 2007. "Bureaucratic Reform and E-Government in the United States: An Institutional Perspective," No. 07–006.
- Di Giulio, M., and Vecchi, G. 2021. "Implementing Digitalization in the Public Sector. Technologies, Agency, and Governance," *Public Policy and Administration* (38:2), SAGE Publications, p. 095207672110232. (<https://doi.org/10.1177/09520767211023283>).
- Google Scholar. (n.d.). "Google Scholar." (<https://scholar.google.com/>, accessed April 6, 2023).
- Gunderson, L. H., and Holling, C. S. 2002. "Panarchy: Understanding Transformations in Human and Natural Systems - Google Books." (https://books.google.ro/books?hl=en&lr=&id=mBW8BwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR2&dq=Panarchy:+understanding+transformations+in+human+and+natural+systems&ots=9MsSHr9uPs&sig=b4knb44hnjHUKFwam1PW_rx7KyM&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Panarchy%3A%20understanding%20transformations%20in%20human%20and%20natural%20systems&f=false, accessed April 3, 2023).
- "Guvernul României (Romanian Government)." (n.d.). *Wikipedia*. (https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guvernul_Rom%C3%A2niei, accessed July 1, 2023).
- Haque, M. S., Ramesh, M., Puppim de Oliveira, J. A., and Gomide, A. de A. 2021. "Building Administrative Capacity for Development: Limits and Prospects," *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 211–219. (<https://doi.org/10.1177/00208523211002605>).
- Heintze, T., and Bretschneider, S. 2000. "Information Technology and Restructuring in Public Organizations: Does Adoption of Information Technology Affect Organizational Structures, Communications, and Decision Making?," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* (10:4), pp. 801–830. (<https://academic.oup.com/jpart/article/10/4/801/995010>).
- Hill, C. J., and Lynn, L. E. 2019. "Public Management: Thinking and Acting in Three Dimensions," *CQ Press*, pp. 1–51. (<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483395814>).
- Hintea, C. 2008. "Public Management Reforms: Romania," in *Public Management Reforms in Central and Eastern Europe*, G. Bouckaert, J. Nemeč, V. Nakrošis, G. Hajnal, and K. Tönnesson (eds.), Bratislava: NISPAcee Press, pp. 271–286.
- Hințea, C. E. 2020. "Four Elements of Successful Reform," *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* (42:1), Routledge, pp. 9–11. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2020.1741864>).
- Hințea, C., Șandor, S. D., and Junjan, V. 2002. "Administrative Reform in Romania and the European Union," *Revista Transilvană de Științe Administrative (Transylvanian Journal of Administrative Sciences)* (1:7), pp. 54–74.
- Hooghe, L., and Marks, G. 2003. "Unraveling the Central State, but How? Types of Multi-Level Governance," *American Political Science Review* (97:2), pp. 233–243. (<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000649>).
- Hristea, C. 2018. "Abordarea Sistemică a Digitalizării Guvernării Și a Administrației (The Systemic Approach to the Digitalization of Government and Administration)," in *Caiet Documentar 3. România Digitală. Concepte Și Instrumente Operaționale (Documentary Notebook 3. Digital Romania. Concepts and Operational Tools)* (Vol. 3), A. Băițan (ed.), București: Club România, pp. 223–232.
- Hsu, C.-K., Marsh, R. M., and Mannari, H. 1983. "An Examination of the Determinants of Organizational Structure," *American Journal of Sociology* (88:5), pp. 975–996. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2779447>).
- Hutchcroft, P. D. 2001. "Centralization and Decentralization in Administration and Politics: Assessing Territorial Dimensions of Authority and Power," *Governance* (14:1), Blackwell Publishing Inc., pp. 23–53. (<https://doi.org/10.1111/0952-1895.00150>).
- Hwang, H., and Colyvas, J. A. 2011. "Problematizing Actors and Institutions in Institutional Work," *Journal of Management Inquiry* (20:1), pp. 62–66. (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492610387705>).
- Iftimiei, M. 2021. "Digitization of Public Administration. Romania of the 21st Century," *Analele Științifice Ale Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Din Iasi. Științe Juridice (Scientific Annals of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University from Iasi. Legal Sciences)* (67:1), Editura Universitatii Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iasi, pp. 239–250. (<https://doi.org/10.47743/jss-2021-67-1-17>).
- Janssen, M., and Estevez, E. 2013. "Lean Government and Platform-Based Governance-Doing More with Less," *Government Information Quarterly* (30:SUPPL. 1). (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.11.003>).

- Janssen, M., and Van Der Voort, H. 2017. "Adaptive Governance. Towards a Stable, Accountable and Responsive Government," *Government Information Quarterly* (33:1), pp. 1–5. (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2016.02.003>).
- Jugureanu, R. 2018. "E2030 – Renașterea României Prin Educație. Istoria Pe Scurt a Informatizării Școlii Românești (E2030 – The Rebirth of Romania through Education. Brief History of Romanian School Computerization)," in *Caiet Documentar 3. România Digitală. Concepte Și Instrumente Operaționale (Documentary Notebook 3. Digital Romania. Concepts and Operational Tools)* (Vol. 3), A. Băișan (ed.), București: Club România, pp. 677–687.
- Jung, C. S., and Kim, S. E. 2014. "Structure and Perceived Performance in Public Organizations," *Public Management Review* (16:5), Routledge, pp. 620–642. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2012.743576>).
- Khatsenkova, S. 2023. "Romania's Prime Minister Has Hired the World's First AI Government Adviser. What Will It Do?," *EuroNews*. (<https://www.euronews.com/next/2023/03/06/romaniias-prime-minister-has-hired-the-worlds-first-ai-government-adviser-what-will-it-do>).
- Khemani, S. 2017. "Political Economy of Reform," No. 8224. (<http://econ.worldbank.org>).
- Kickert, W. J. M., and van der Meer, F. B. 2011. "Small, Slow, and Gradual Reform: What Can Historical Institutionalism Teach Us?," *International Journal of Public Administration* (34:8), pp. 475–485. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2011.583768>).
- Knott, J. H., and Payne, A. A. 2004. "The Impact of State Governance Structures on Management and Performance of Public Organizations: A Study of Higher Education Institutions," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (23:1), John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, pp. 13–30. (<https://doi.org/10.1002/PAM.10176>).
- KU Leuven. (n.d.). "LIBISnet - KU Leuven Libraries." (<https://bib.kuleuven.be/english/libis/libisnet>, accessed April 6, 2023).
- Larsson, A., and Teigland, R. (eds.). 2019. *Digital Transformation and Public Services. Societal Impacts in Sweden and Beyond*, Routledge.
- Lepsius, M. R. 2016. *Max Weber and Institutional Theory*, (1st ed.), (C. Wendt, ed.), Springer International Publishing.
- Lumivero. (n.d.). "NVivo," *Lumivero Official Website*. (<https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/>, accessed July 10, 2023).
- Lynn, L. E. 2013. "Chapter 1: Public Management," in *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*, Peters B Guy and Pierre Jon (eds.), London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 17–31. (<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446200506>).
- Mansfield, R. 1973. "Bureaucracy and Centralization: An Examination of Organizational Structure," *Administrative Science Quarterly* (18:4), pp. 477–488.
- March, J. G., and Olsen, J. P. 1984. "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life," *The American Political Science Review* (78:3), pp. 734–749.
- Marche, S., and McNiven, J. D. 2003. "E-Government and E-Governance: The Future Isn't What It Used To Be," *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences* (20:1), pp. 74–86. (<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1936-4490.2003.tb00306.x>).
- Mergel, I., Edelmann, N., and Haug, N. 2019. *Defining Digital Transformation: Results from Expert Interviews* ✱. (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2019.06.002>).
- Meyer, J. W. 2008. "Reflections on Institutional Theories of Organizations," in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, T. B. Lawrence, and R. E. Meyer (eds.), SAGE, pp. 788–809.
- Meyer, J. W., and Rowan, B. 1977. "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," *American Journal of Sociology* (83:2), pp. 340–363. (<https://about.jstor.org/terms>).
- Meyer, M. W. 1968. "The Two Authority Structures of Bureaucratic Organization," *Administrative Science Quarterly* (13:2), pp. 211–228. (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2391452>).
- Mihălcescu, H. 2022. "The Need and Future of Digitalization in Romania-a Delphi Method Research," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management* (1:1), pp. 108–112. (www.etimm.ase.ro108).
- Miller, K. 2009. "The Promise of Going Lean," *Governing*.
- Morariu, A. 2022. "Digitalization of Public Administration in the Context of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 and the Implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)," *Ovidius University Annals, Economic Sciences Series*, pp. 109–116.
- Moynihan, D. P. 2013. "Chapter 4: Identifying the Antecedents to Government Performance: Implications for Human Resource Management," in *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*, Peters B Guy Pierre Jon (ed.), London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 71–86. (<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446200506>).

- Neamțu, B. 2016. “Asymmetric Decentralization in Romania: Lost Opportunity,” *Online Journal Modelling the New Europe* (20), pp. 47–90.
- Newton, K., and Deth, J. W. van. 2009a. “Decision Making,” in *Foundations of Comparative Politics*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 315–336. (<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511806803.023>).
- Newton, K., and Deth, J. W. van. 2009b. “Constitutions,” in *Foundations of Comparative Politics*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 71–90. (<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511806803.010>).
- Newton, K., and Deth, J. W. van. 2012a. “States and Democracy,” in *Foundations of Comparative Politics*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 34–52. (<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511806803.007>).
- Newton, K., and Deth, J. W. van. 2012b. “Policy Making and Legislating: Executives and Legislatures,” in *Foundations of Comparative Politics*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 134–151. (<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511806803.013>).
- Newton, K., and Deth, J. W. van. 2012c. “The Development of the Modern State,” in *Foundations of Comparative Politics*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 13–33. (<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511806803.006>).
- Newton, K., and Deth, J. W. van. 2012d. “Implementation: The Public Bureaucracy,” in *Foundations of Comparative Politics*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 152–168. (<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511806803.014>).
- Newton, K., and Deth, J. W. van. 2012e. “Presidential and Parliamentary Government,” in *Foundations of Comparative Politics*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 91–104. (<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511806803.011>).
- Nicoară, A. 2018. “România Digitală – Istoric. Lecții Învățate. Opțiuni de Viitor (Digital Romania – History. Lessons Learned. Future Options),” in *Caiet Documentar 3. România Digitală. Concepte Și Instrumente Operaționale (Documentary Notebook 3. Digital Romania. Concepts and Operational Tools)* (Vol. 3), A. Băițan (ed.), București: Club România, pp. 196–212.
- Niță, V. 2021. “FOCUS OF THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE (NPRR) ON DIGITALIZATION: FINANCIAL EFFORT AND EXPECTED RESULTS,” in *Pandemic Challenges for European Finance, Business and Regulation*, M. Tofan, I. Bilan, and E. Cigu (eds.), pp. 317–329.
- Odat, A. M. 2012. “E-Government in Developing Countries: Framework of Challenges and Opportunities,” *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology* (31:2). (www.jatit.org).
- Olsen, J. P. 2016. “An Institutional Perspective,” in *Theory and Practice of Public Sector Reform* (1st ed.), S. Van de Walle and S. Groeneveld (eds.), Routledge.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. 2005. *E-Government for Better Government*, OECD.
- Peters, B. G. 2018. “The Challenge of Policy Coordination,” *Policy Design and Practice* (1:1), UBM Exhibition Singapore PTE LTD, pp. 1–11. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2018.1437946>).
- Petrescu, C., and Mihalache, F. 2020. “Perceptions towards the Quality of Public Services in Romania. Poor Outcomes of Public Administration Reforms?,” *Calitatea Vieții* (31:2), pp. 263–285.
- Pugh, D. S., Hickson, D. J., Hinings, C. R., Macdonald, K. M., and Turner, C. 1963. “A Conceptual Scheme for Organizational Analysis,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* (8:3), pp. 289–315.
- Radnor, Z. 2010. “Transferring Lean into Government,” *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management* (21:3), pp. 411–428. (<https://doi.org/10.1108/17410381011024368>).
- Radu, A. F., and Petcu, I. 2021. “Intrinsic Aspects of E-Government Consolidation across the European Union. Case Study: Romania,” *Romanian Journal of Information Technology and Automatic Control* (31:4), ICI Bucharest, pp. 83–96. (<https://doi.org/10.33436/v31i4y202107>).
- Răuță, E. 2015. “A Decision-Making Model for Public Management. The Existence of a Policy Framework for Performance in Romania,” *International Review of Social Research* (4:1), University of Bucharest, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, pp. 57–74. (<https://doi.org/10.1515/irsr-2014-0005>).
- Reddick, C. G. (ed.). 2010. *Integrated Series in Information Systems: Comparative E-Government*, (Vol. 25), Springer. (<http://www.springer.com/series/6157>).
- Rexed, K. 2008. “A Comprehensive Framework for Public Administration Reforms: A Reply to Jocelyne Bourgon,” *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, pp. 131–143. (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852307085739>).
- Romanian Government. 2015. “Government Decree No. 245 of 7th of April 2015 for the Approval of the National Strategy Regarding the Digital Agenda for Romania 2020,” *Official Gazette No. 340 of 19th of May 2015*.
- Romanian Government. 2019a. “Governmental Emergency Ordinance No. 68 of 6th of November 2019 Regarding the Establishment of Certain Measures at the Level of the Central Public Administration

- and for the Modification and Completion of Certain Normative Acts,” *Official Gazette No. 898 of 6th of November 2019*.
- Romanian Government. 2019b. “Governmental Emergency Ordinance No. 90 of 30th of December 2019 Regarding the Establishment of Certain Measures at the Level of the Central Public Administration,” *Official Gazette No. 1059 of 31st of December 2019*.
- Romanian Government. 2019c. “The Administrative Code of 03.07.2019, Integral Part of the Emergency Ordinance 57/2019,” *Official Gazette Part I No. 555 of 05 July 2019*, Romania: Lege5. (<https://lege5.ro/App/Document/gm2dcnrygm3q/tipurile-de-acte-adoptate-de-guvern-codul-administrativ>).
- Romanian Government. 2020a. “Governmental Emergency Ordinance No. 212 of 28th of December 2020 Regarding the Establishment of Certain Measures at the Level of the Central Public Administration and for the Modification and Completion of Certain Normative Acts,” *Official Gazette No. 1307 of 29th of December 2020*, Portal Legislativ. (<https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/235735>).
- Romanian Government. 2020b. “Governmental Decree No. 89 from of 28th of January 2020 Regarding the Organisation and Operation of the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania,” *Official Gazette No. 113 of 13th of February 2020*, Portal Legislativ. (<https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/223055>).
- Romanian Government. 2021a. “Annex No. 1 Organizational Structure of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation to Governmental Decision 371/2021 (According to the Provisions of GEO No. 212/2020),” *The Romanian Government Official Website*. (<https://www.research.gov.ro/minister/organizare/>).
- Romanian Government. 2021b. “Governmental Decree No. 371 from 12th of April 2021 Regarding the Organisation and Operation of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation,” *Official Gazette No. 333, Part I, of 1st of April 2021*, LEX EXPERT.
- Romanian Government. 2023. “Organisation Chart - Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania,” *The Romanian Government Official Website*. (<https://www.adr.gov.ro/organigrama/>, accessed June 10, 2023).
- Romanian Government. (n.d.). “Ministere (Ministries),” *The Romanian Government’s Official Website*. (<https://www.gov.ro/ro/guvernul/organizare/ministere>, accessed April 6, 2023).
- Rubin, H. J., and Rubin, I. S. 2012. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, SAGE Publications. ([https://books.google.ro/books?hl=en&lr=&id=bgekGK_xpYsC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Rubin,+H.+J.,+%26+Rubin,+I.+S.+\(2011\).+%22Qualitative+interviewing:+The+art+of+hearing+data.%22+Sage+Publications.&ots=tJbAmNo4Lf&sig=FqLnNrx4e6CIXkLhiTpbm6jlyVo&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.ro/books?hl=en&lr=&id=bgekGK_xpYsC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Rubin,+H.+J.,+%26+Rubin,+I.+S.+(2011).+%22Qualitative+interviewing:+The+art+of+hearing+data.%22+Sage+Publications.&ots=tJbAmNo4Lf&sig=FqLnNrx4e6CIXkLhiTpbm6jlyVo&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false)).
- Saldaña, J. 2020. “Qualitative Data Analysis Strategies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.), P. Leavy (ed.), Oxford University Press, pp. 876–911. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.001.0001>).
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., and Thornhill, A. 2019. “Research Methods for Business Students,” *Research Methods for Business Students* (8th ed.), New York: Pearson. (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kuleuvenul/reader.action?docID=5774742&ppg=35&pq-origsite=primo>).
- Schou, J., and Hjelholt, M. 2018. *Digitalization and Public Sector Transformations*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Scott, W. R. 1975. “Organizational Structure,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 20 (1:1), pp. 1–20. (www.annualreviews.org).
- Scott, W. R. 1987. “The Adolescence of Institutional Theory,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* (32:4), pp. 493–511. (<http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>).
- Scott, W. R. 2008. “Approaching Adulthood: The Maturing of Institutional Theory,” *Theory and Society* (37:5), pp. 427–442. (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-008-9067-z>).
- Simon, H. A. 1965. “Administrative Decision Making,” *Public Administration Review* (25:1), pp. 31–37.
- Simons, H. 2020. “Case Study Research: In-Depth Understanding in Context,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.), P. Leavy (ed.), Oxford University Press, pp. 767–703. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.001.0001>).
- Smoke, P. 2015. “Rethinking Decentralization: Assessing Challenges to a Popular Public Sector Reform,” *Public Administration and Development* (35:2), John Wiley and Sons Ltd, pp. 97–112. (<https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.1703>).
- Spencer, R., Pryce, J. M., and Walsh, J. 2020. “Philosophical Approaches to Qualitative Research,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.), P. Leavy (ed.), Oxford University Press, pp. 112–142. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.001.0001>).
- Stan, L. 2013. *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania: The Politics of Memory*, Cambridge University Press.

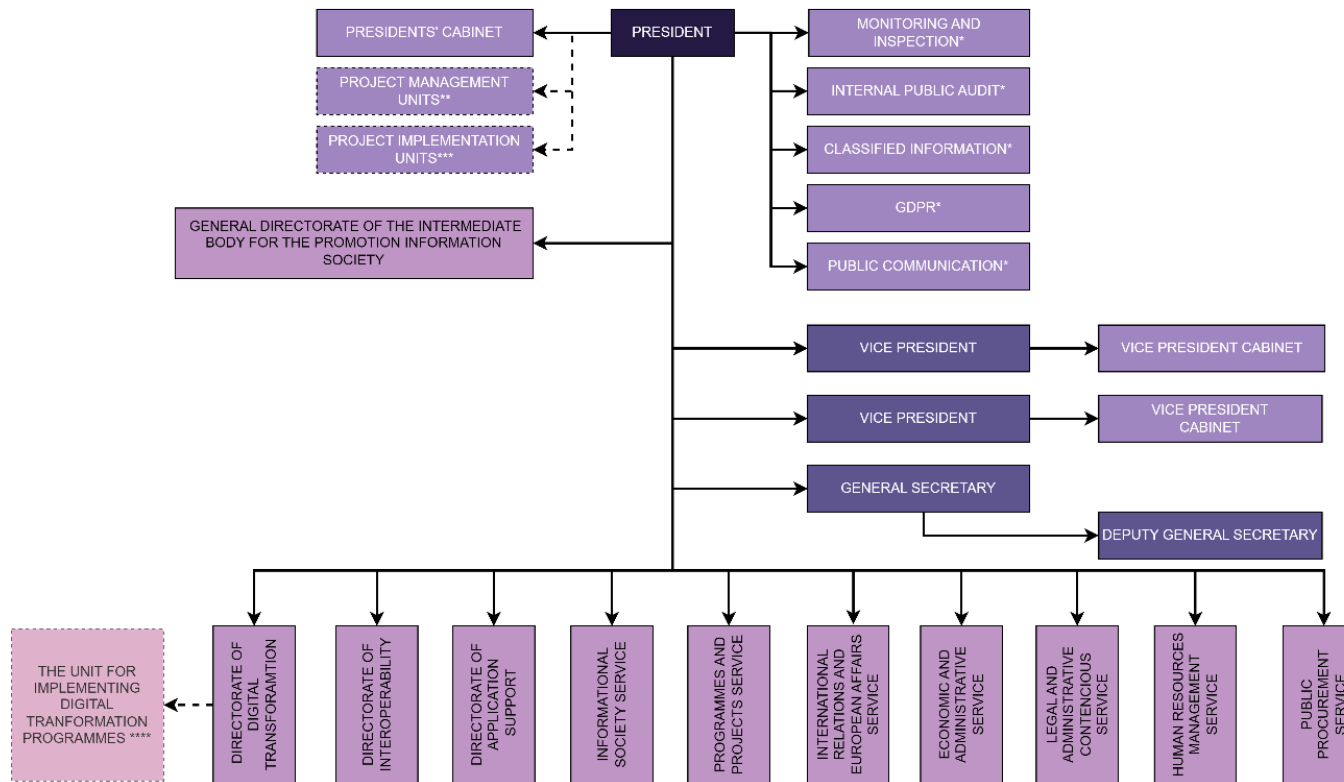
- Stoica, M., and Ghilic-Micu, B. 2020. "E-Government in Romania – A Case Study," *Journal of E-Government Studies and Best Practices* (2020), IBIMA Publishing. (<https://doi.org/10.5171/2020.608643>).
- Suwaj, P. J. 2013. "Chapter 42: Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe," in *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*, Peters B Guy Pierre Jon (ed.), London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 659–672. (<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446200506>).
- 't Hart, P., Rosenthal, U., and Kouzmin, A. 1993. "Crisis Decision Making: The Centralization Thesis Revisited," *Administration & Society* (25:1), pp. 12–45.
- Tallinn University of Technology Library. (n.d.). "Primo Portal," *LIBISnet - TUTL*. (https://tutl-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/search?vid=372TUTL_VU1&sortby=rank&lang=en_US, accessed May 31, 2023).
- The Government of Romania. 2019. "Governmental Emergency Ordinance No. 68 of 6th of November 2019 Regarding the Establishment of Certain Measures at the Level of the Central Public Administration and for the Modification and Completion of Certain Normative Acts," *The Romanian Official Monitor No. 898 of 6th of November 2019*, Portal Legislativ. (<https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/219553>).
- Thoenig, J.-C. 2013. "Chapter 10: Institutional Theories and Public Institutions: New Agendas and Appropriateness," in *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*, Peters B Guy Pierre Jon (ed.), London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 169–179. (<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446200506>).
- Țigănașu, R., Încălțărău, C., and Pascariu, G. C. 2018. "Administrative Capacity, Structural Funds Absorption and Development. Evidence from Central and Eastern Countries," *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* (18:1), pp. 39–59.
- Tommasi, M., and Weinschelbaum, F. 2007. "Centralization vs. Decentralization: A Principal-Agent Analysis," *Journal of Public Economic Theory* (9:2), pp. 369–389. (<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9779.2007.00311.x>).
- Toonen, T. A. 2013. "Chapter 36: Administrative Reform: Analytics," in *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*, Peters B Guy Pierre Jon (ed.), London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 565–576. (<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446200506>).
- Torres, L., Pina, V., and Royo, S. 2005. "E-Government and the Transformation of Public Administrations in EU Countries: Beyond NPM or Just a Second Wave of Reforms?," *Online Information Review* (29:5), pp. 531–553. (<https://doi.org/10.1108/14684520510628918>).
- Trent, A., and Cho, J. 2020. "Interpretation In Qualitative Research: What, Why, How," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.), P. Leavy (ed.), Oxford University Press, pp. 956–982. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.001.0001>).
- Tsebelis, G. 1995. "Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartyism," *British Journal of Political Science* (25:3), pp. 289–325.
- Tsebelis, G. 2000. "Veto Players and Institutional Analysis," *Governance* (13:4), Blackwell Publishing Inc., pp. 441–474. (<https://doi.org/10.1111/0952-1895.00141>).
- Verhoest, K., Bouckaert, G., and Peters, B. G. 2007. "Janus-Faced Reorganization: Specialization and Coordination in Four OECD Countries in the Period 1980–2005," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* (73:3), pp. 325–348. (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852307081144>).
- Van der Voet, J. 2014. "The Uniqueness and Development of Research Methods in Public Administration Research," *Public Administration Review* (74:6). (<https://doi.org/10.1111/puar>).
- Voicu, D. 2018. "Elemente Critice Pentru o Strategie Națională de Transformare Digitală (Critical Elements for a National Digital Transformation Strategy)," in *Caiet Documentar 3. România Digitală. Concepte Și Instrumente Operaționale (Documentary Notebook 3. Digital Romania. Concepts and Operational Tools)* (Vol. 3), A. Băițan (ed.), București: Club România, pp. 131–132.
- Van de Walle, S. 2016. "Reforming Organizational Structures," in *Theory and Practice of Public Sector Reform* (1st ed.), S. Van de Walle and S. Groeneveld (eds.), Routledge.
- Van De Walle, S., and Groeneveld, S. 2016. "Introduction: Theory and Practice of Public Sector Reform," in *Theory and Practice of Public Sector Reform*, S. Van De Walle and S. Groeneveld (eds.), New York: Routledge, pp. 1–7. (www.routledge.com).
- Willmott, H. 2015. "Why Institutional Theory Cannot Be Critical," *Journal of Management Inquiry* (24:1), SAGE Publications Inc., pp. 105–111. (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492614545306>).
- Woiceshyn, J., and Daellenbach, U. 2018. "Evaluating Inductive vs Deductive Research in Management Studies," *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* (13:2), Emerald, pp. 183–195. (<https://doi.org/10.1108/qrom-06-2017-1538>).
- Wouters, S., Lember, V., and Cropvoets, J. 2021. "Coordinating the Digital Transformation of Inter-Organizational Public Services – The Case of e-Invoicing in Belgium," *Der Moderne Staat –*

- Zeitschrift Für Public Policy, Recht Und Management* (14:1–2021), Verlag Barbara Budrich GmbH, pp. 121–139. (<https://doi.org/10.3224/dms.v14i1.06>).
- Wynen, J., Verhoest, K., and Kleizen, B. 2016. “More Reforms, Less Innovation? The Impact of Structural Reform Histories on Innovation-Oriented Cultures in Public Organizations ,” *Public Management Review* (19:8), pp. 1142–1164. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2016.1266021>).
- Yin, R. K. 2017. “Getting Started: How to Know Whether and When to Use the Case Study as a Research Method,” in *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Zarembka, P. 2021. *Key Elements of Social Theory Revolutionized by Marx*, Leiden: Brill Publishers.
- Zhang, J., Li, H., and Yang, K. 2022. “A Meta-Analysis of the Government Performance—Trust Link: Taking Cultural and Methodological Factors into Account,” *Public Administration Review* (82:1), John Wiley and Sons Inc, pp. 39–58. (<https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13439>).

Appendix

A Organisational Chart of ADR

Annex to the Government's decision no.89/2020



Maximum no. of positions: 285, exclusive of dignitaries and the positions related to dignitaries' offices

* It is organised and functions at the level of department/office/service;

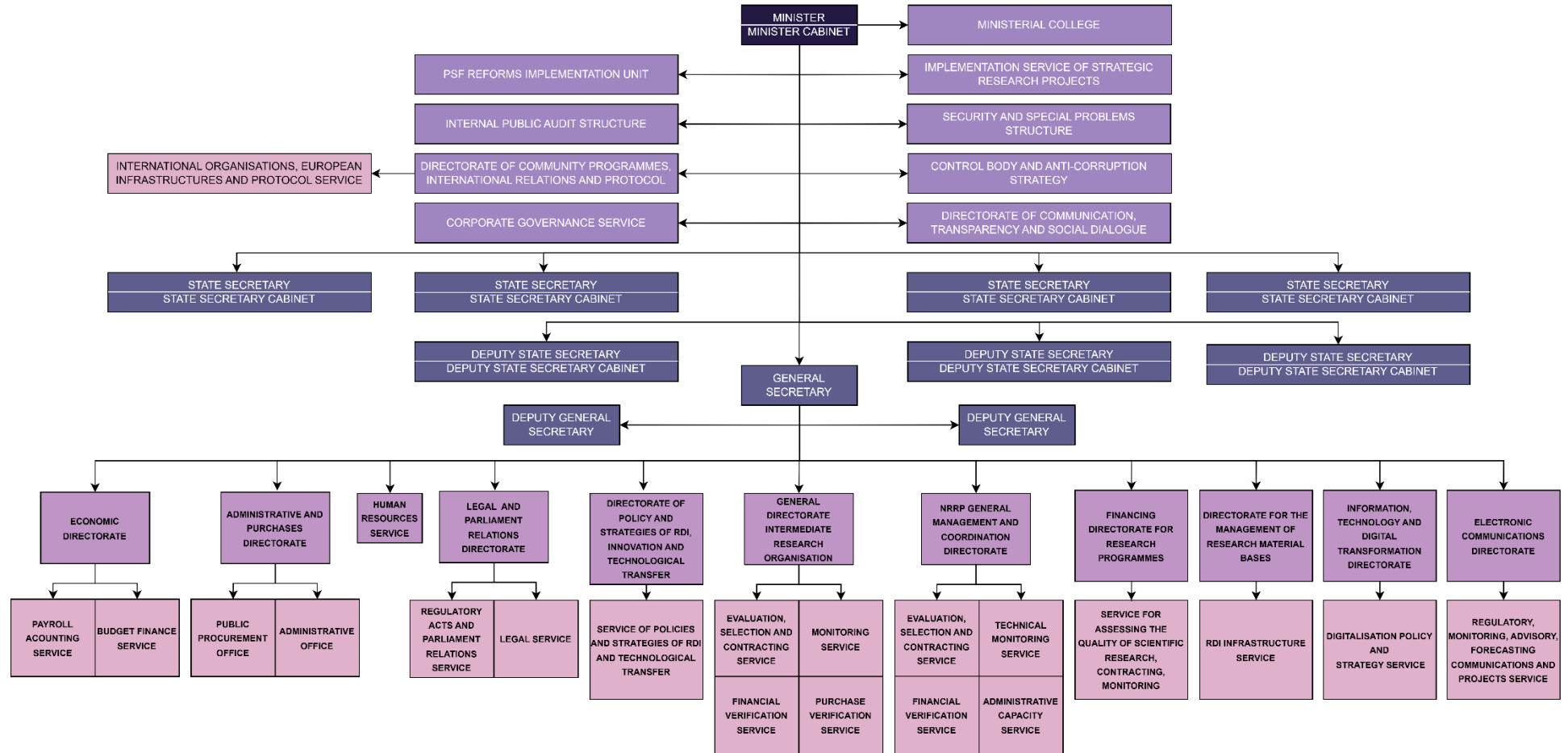
** It is organised and functions as a unit without legal personality distinct from the organisational structure of the authority;

*** It is organised and functions as a unit without legal personality, distinct from the organisational structure of the authority;

**** It is organised and functions as a unit without legal personality, distinct from the organisational structure of the authority, staffed with specialists outside the organisational chart, during the implementation of the NRRP of Romania.

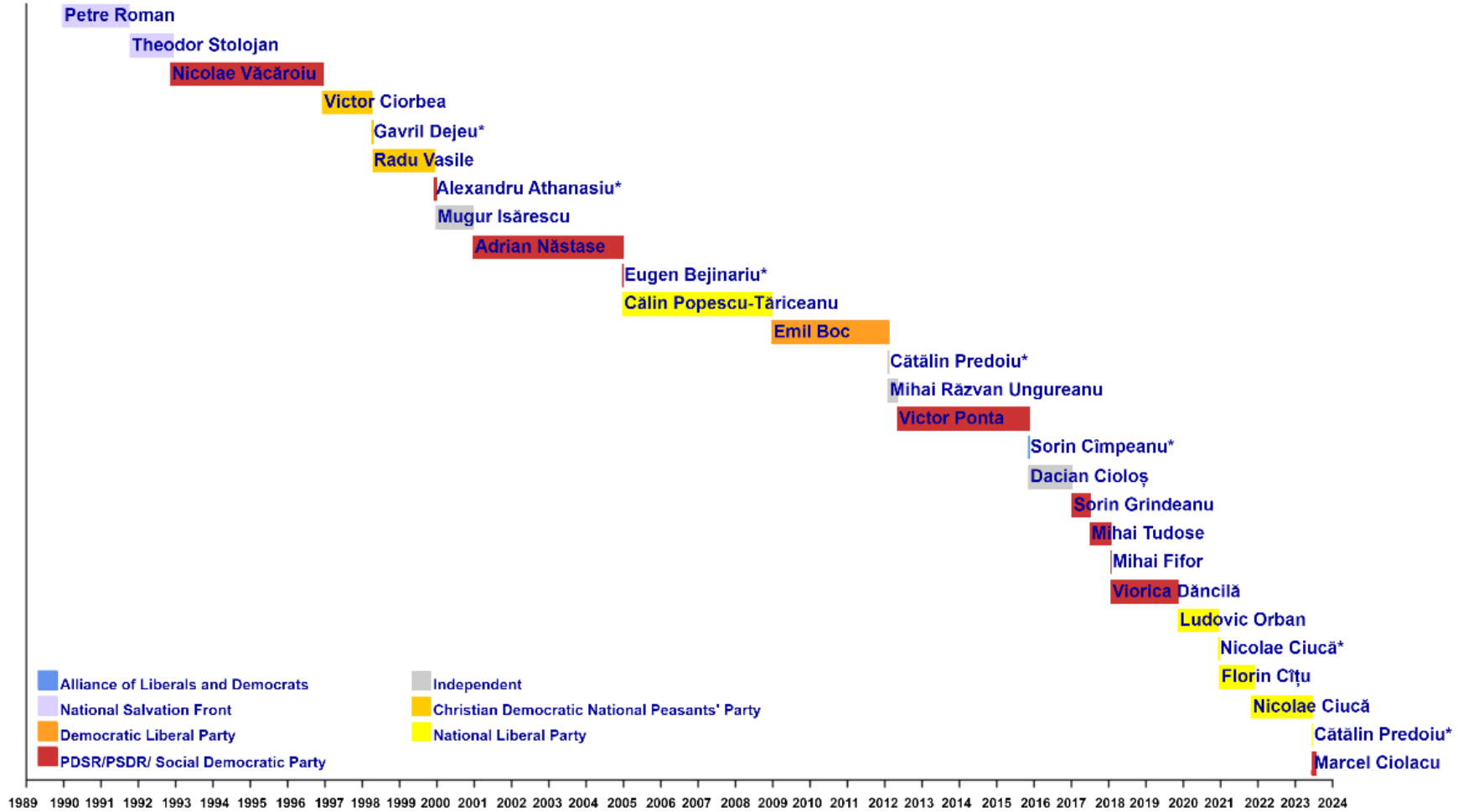
B Organisational Chart of MRID

Annex to the Government's decision no. 371/2021



Maximum no. of positions: 358, exclusive of dignitaries and the positions related to dignitaries' offices
 Total no. of occupied positions: 188, exclusive of dignitaries and the positions related to dignitaries' offices

C List of Romanian Prime Ministers (1989 – 2023), adapted from “Guvernul României (Romanian Government)” (n.d.)



* Interim

D Former Organisation of the Ministries targeted by the 2019 Reforms (2000 – 2023)

No.	In office	Prime-Minister	Ministerial Organisation of the IT&C, Research, and Infrastructure domains
1.	Dec 1999 – Dec 2000	Mugur Isărescu	N/A*
2.	Dec 2000 – Dec 2004	Adrian Năstase	Ministry of Education and Research (before Jun 2003) // Ministry of Education, Research and Youth (Jun 2003 – Mar 2004)
			Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
			Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Housing (before Jun 2003)// Ministry of Transport, Constructions and Tourism (after Jun 2003)
3.	Dec 2004 – Dec 2004	Eugen Bejinariu (interim for 7 days)	N/A*
4.	Dec 2004 – Apr 2007	Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu (1)	Ministry of Education and Research
			Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
			Ministry of Transport, Constructions and Tourism
5.	Apr 2007 – Dec 2008	Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu (2)	Ministry of Education, Research and Youth
			Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
			Ministry of Transport
6.	Dec 2008 – Feb 2012	Emil Boc	Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation
			Ministry of Communications and Information Society
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
7.	Feb 2012 – Feb 2012	Cătălin Predoiu (interim for 3 days)	N/A*
8.	Feb 2012 – May 2012	Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu	Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports
			Ministry of Communications and Information Society
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure

9.	May 2012 – Dec 2012	Victor Ponta (1)	Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports
			Ministry of Communications and Information Society
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
10.	Dec 2012 – Nov 2015	Victor Ponta (2)	<i>Delegate Minister for Higher Education, Scientific Research and Technological Development</i>
			Ministry of Communications and Information Society
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
11.	Nov 2015 – Nov 2015	Sorin Câmpeanu (interim for 12 days)	N/A*
12.	Nov 2015 – Jan 2017	Dacian Cioloș	Ministry of Education and Scientific Research
			Ministry of Communications and Information Society
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
13.	Jan 2017 – Jun 2017	Sorin Grindeanu	Ministry of Education and Scientific Research
			Ministry of Communications and Information Society
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
14.	Jun 2017 – Jan 2018	Mihai Tudose	Ministry of Research and Innovation
			Ministry of Communications and Information Society
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
15.	Jan 2018 – Jan 2018	Mihai Fifor	N/A* (interim for 16 days)
16.	Jan 2018 – Nov 2019	Viorica Dăncilă	Ministry of Research and Innovation
			Ministry of Communications and Information Society
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
17.	Nov 2019 – Dec 2020	Ludovic Orban	Ministry of Education and Research
			Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Communications
18.	Dec 2020 – Dec 2020	Nicolae Ciucă (interim for 16 days)	Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
19.	Dec 2020 – Nov 2021	Florin Cîțu	Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
20.	Nov 2021 – Jun 2023	Nicolae Ciucă	Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
21.	Jun 2023 – Jun 2023	Cătălin Predoiu (interim for 3 days)	Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation

			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
22.	Jun 2023 – Current times	Marcel Ciolacu	Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation
			Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
*No data could be retrieved with regard to the composition of the respective Government			

E Interview Guide

INTRODUCTION OF THE RESEARCH TOPIC

First, I wanted to thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in this interview.

I would like to start with a brief presentation of each of us. My name is Paula Pruneci, and I am currently an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master student in Public Sector Innovation and eGovernance.

As I told you in the previously sent message, through this interview I aim to discover potential factors that led to the reconfiguration of the attributions regarding digitalisation within the Romanian Government and the creation, or rather, the reorganisation of the former institutions dealing with digitalisation in what we know today as the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania and, respectively, the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation.

RECORDING REQUEST

Before I give you the floor to introduce yourself, I would like to ask for your consent to record this interview. As stipulated in the consent form signed by you, this is done only for the purpose of subsequently transcribing my interview as to assist me in the analysis of the findings. In short, the recording will not be made public, and the version of it attached to the Appendices section of the thesis will be completely anonymised.

RESPONDENT INTRODUCTION

1. Now that I have started the recording, I will give you the floor and I will ask you to introduce yourself, to describe your role within the organisation you come from, and what links you to the public sector's digitalisation realm or to the public sector in general.

CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

2. What do you consider having been the needs, challenges or significant events related to digitalisation that motivated the Government to consolidate or establish ADR, respectively MRID?
3. What do you think were the objectives pursued by all this institutional rearrangement?
4. How do you think the creation of a specialised Ministry and of an Authority dedicated to digitalisation, addresses the existing vulnerabilities or gaps?
 - a. Are these two institutions contributing to a more resilient agenda towards digital transformation?
5. What do you think were the reasons behind the placement of ADR from the coordination of the Prime Minister to the subordination of the current Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation?

EVALUATION OF ENVIROMENTAL PRESSURES

(Technical pressures)

6. Were there any certain economic conditions, market pressures or maybe internal institutional weaknesses which played a role in initiating the reform?
 - a. Please expand on the description of the exemplified circumstances.
7. Do you think EU requirements, rules or the Member State status of Romania played a role in initiating the reform? For example, to what extent has the need to comply with international standards and norms led to this institutional restructuring?

(Institutional pressures)

8. Were there certain EU values that might have steered the initiation of these reforms?
9. Do you think that observing successful examples (of digitalisation initiatives or specialised governmental bodies in other countries) influenced the decision to establish such institutions in Romania as well?

(Prevalent choice)

10. If you were to balance these two types of influences, which one do you think would weigh more heavily in shaping the reform decisions that we have previously discussed about?

EVALUATION OF CULTURAL FEATURES

11. Is there a culture or some defining cultural factors of the Romanian Governmental Administration?
- a. Please expand on the description of the exemplified circumstances.
12. Did the former institutions in charge of digitalisation have a specific culture of their own?
- a. Please expand on the description of the exemplified circumstances.
13. I would like to return to the pressures I mentioned earlier. Do you think these pressures have altered or can alter the cultural traits of the administration?
- a. Please expand on the description of the exemplified circumstances.

EVALUATION OF POLITY FEATURES

14. Do you consider that the establishment of ADR and MRID aligns with the existing institutional frameworks, governance structures and policy-making processes in Romania?
- a. Why?
15. How do ADR and MRID contribute to increasing the legitimacy of the Government in promoting digital transformation and developing a resilient digital agenda?
16. Do you consider that the ADR and the MRID support other broader transformation objectives of the Romanian Government?
- a. Why?

F Informed Consent Template

Please read this informed consent document carefully. Make sure to pose all your clarifying questions about the research before participation.

Information about the research project

Provisional title: Unfolding the Migration of Digital Capacities within the Romanian Government. An Analysis of the Underlying Rationales for Institutional Reform.

Institution(s): KU Leuven, WWU Münster, Tallinn University of Technology

Researcher: Paula-Andra Pruneci (Erasmus Mundus M.Sc. in Public Sector Innovation and eGovernance (Pioneer), Graduate Student)

Contact: paulaandra.pruneci@student.kuleuven.be / paprun@taltech.ee

Supervisor: Dr. Veiko Lember (Senior Research Fellow, Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, TalTech, and Visiting Professor, KU Leuven)

Co-Supervisor: Dr. Amirouche Moktefi (Senior Lecturer, Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, TalTech)

Research objectives and methodology

This study aims to understand potential factors that led to the reconfiguration of capacities regarding digitalisation within the Romanian Government, namely the creation or consolidation of the Authority for Digitalisation of Romania and of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation. Therefore, this thesis strives to delve beyond the existing arguments of the normative and scientific fields and discover the prevailing reasons and needs that led to these institutional changes, respectively to the creation of specialised bodies in the field of digitalisation, such as those previously mentioned.

Research intervention

I am aware that I am asked to participate in a semi-structured interview that will take approximately 20-60 minutes. The interview will be held online, using video conferencing software. The interview will follow an interview guide assembled by the researcher but may include additional ad-hoc questions that arise during the interview.

Information

I have received sufficient information about its purpose and methods of this research. I understand what is expected of me during this study.

Recording

I consent to the interview being audio/video recorded and transcribed into writing to facilitate data processing and analysis.

Voluntary participation

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I have the right to stop participating at any time. I do not have to give a reason for this, and I know that it will not have any negative repercussions for me. Taking part in this study does not involve known risks or inconveniences. My responses will only contribute to a comprehensive analysis of the institutional landscape and inform recommendations based on paradigms from the literature.

Compensation

My participation offers a voluntary contribution to scientific research and advancement. I know that I will not receive any further reward or compensation for my participation.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Under the GDPR, the data collected during this study will be processed on the grounds of public interest. This implies that when I withdraw from the study, any previously collected data can still be lawfully processed and do not need to be deleted by the researchers. In case a third-party acts as a processor of the collected data, it can be requested at any time to have the processing of the data stopped and, where appropriate, have the collected data deleted.

I understand that some of the data collected for the purposes of this study might be classified as “sensitive personal data” under the General Data Protection Regulation. I hereby expressly consent to the collection of this data for the purposes of this study.

Confidentiality

The results of this study can be used for scientific goals and may be published. My name will not be published, as all responses collected through this interview will be anonymised to ensure participants’ confidentiality. The data presented will only include the institution or organisational affiliation. The confidentiality of my data will be protected in all stages of the research.

In the context of transparency in scientific research, the data of this study may be shared with others, such as researchers from different universities. In that case, only non-identifiable data will be shared. It will not be possible for others to know that I have participated in this study or to know which data belongs to me.

Dissemination of results

In case you wish to remain updated on any published results of this study, please provide the researcher with an e-mail address to contact you at: _____

Contact details

For any questions, concerns, or to exercise your rights (access to or the correction of data, etc.) after participating in the study, you can contact:

- a) The researcher at: paulaandra.pruneci@student.kuleuven.be / paprun@taltech.ee
- b) The supervisor at: veiko.lember@taltech.ee

For any complaints or other concerns about ethical issues relating to this study, you can contact KU Leuven’s Social and Societal Ethics Committee: smec@kuleuven.be

I have read and understood the information above. I received answers to all my questions regarding this study. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in this document.

[To be filled out by the respondent]

[To be filled out by the researcher]

XX June 2023

G Interview Transcripts

Interview No. 1 – CODE: P1
Documented on 26/06/2023, 3 PM
Duration: 75 minutes

Interviewer:

Now that I have started recording, I am going to give you the floor and ask you to introduce yourself, describe your responsibilities and ask you to provide more insights on your specific role within your organisation.

Respondent:

Hello, my name is [...], I am [...] at the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, and besides what my position implies, meaning [...] – I mainly deal with what digitalisation projects. Now, as a background: my history is somewhere about [...] years in this field. My history starts at the origins of this institution because, even though it may seem like a newly created institution, it is not a newly created one; it has a history that goes somewhere from, say, the mid-2000s, meaning 2006-2007. At that time, the institution was called the Agency for Information Society Services. Everything that currently exists in this institution is a result of the whole journey, starting with what the electronic public procurement system means, ghiseul.ro, the single-electronic contact point [*PCUe*], and so on.

Now, from the point of view of what means the necessity for which this institution was formed, or rather, why other institutions have disappeared: I think that here, the element of need is not surprising. I think the main need was that for suppleness of the public administration, from the point of view of the division of certain tasks, with a view to reduce the number of staff and so on. Indeed, it may not have been one of the best moves to be made. At least, in my understanding, the Ministry of Communications and Information Society, the one that was abolished and merged with the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation on the one hand, and the Ministry of Transport on the other, should have remained as a distinct institution which approached things in a transversal manner. This is because digitalisation, after all, is an aspect that can be found in absolutely all fields and on all levels. So, implicitly, the work on digitisation, digitalisation or digital transformation is a far-reaching one.

Now, from the point of view of the configuration of the newly created institution of the ADR, I think this was designed on the one hand to implement the provisions of the NRRP [*National Resilience and Recovery Plan*]. The NRRP provides for the governmental cloud component. The Authority for Digitalisation of Romania, at the moment, is a project leader within this component's dimension, together with the Special Telecommunications Service and the Romanian Intelligence Service through Cyberint, but also within other aspects of Component 7 of NRRP, which comprise the eID card and other digitalisation services from other institutions or central authorities.

Now, as a philosophy of both past and present, more than what I have presented so far, ADR's main function in its various previous forms, and the governance it has had, has been to regulate this spectrum. I call this spectrum generically as eGovernment. eGovernment is the one that globalises everything that means digitisation, digitalisation and only later digital transformation. That is because eGovernment means transposing administration online. In order to be able to translate public administration into the online

environment, first and foremost one needs to facilitate the transition from what the physical environment means to the online environment. In order to be able to do this, the vast majority of registers or necessary information must, first and foremost, be digitised. So that is why I am still going to refer to everything in this spectrum as eGovernment. In all this construction and philosophy, ADR acts transversally with responsibilities given to each institution.

[Approx. 40 seconds of internet connection issues]

ADR worked together to develop the eGovernment public policy, which was adopted, I think, if I remember correctly in 2020, in which all the lines of action are drawn up to the end of 2030. So, we have a public policy in which all directions of action are stipulated, with officials from all areas, where we tried to identify all important levels where digitalisation would be necessary. Here we can enter into various topics, from what the digitalisation of life events means, to what the interoperability part means. Meanwhile, other normative acts have appeared, be they at national level or acquis Communautaire level. Among the most notable ones we have Regulation No. 1724, which appeared in 2018, on the implementation of Single Digital Gateway, where, practically, at national level, a portal must be implemented to unify all public administration services, so that they are available cross-border, following an architecture very clearly defined from a technical point of view by the technical working groups at the European Commission level. That is one thing. At the same time, in 2016, Regulation No. 910 appeared, regarding what electronic identity or identification means, which talks about qualified electronic signature or other identification tools at the level of public administration.

Why did we do all this balancing of legislation and certain elements? In order to be able to offer on one hand the momentary perspective of the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania: currently ADR is responsible for the implementation of this regulation – No. 1724/2018 – and from the perspective of which we are already implementing the ROeID project, as it is called and known at public level. This is the project that will ensure, so to speak, the principle of Single Sign On, a single authentication at the level of all public administration services, through an identification tool, which is supported by several technical tools based on what the Regulation No. 910 means, but from the point of view of ensuring a high level of safety. This is, let us say, one of the pillars of this regulation, because the regulation comes and talks about also implementing a catalogue of services, where the types of services to which it refers are presented in Annexes 1, 2 and 3, respectively, in addition to other directives or regulations that are subject to this Single Digital Gateway regulation. For this, as I said, each EU state will have to make a portal within which to ensure a certain level of efficiency in terms of providing this service, from the perspective of accessibility, respectively authentication, to what data format means and information on these services, as they have been agreed at the level of the European Commission.

From the other perspective or pillar of the Single Digital Gateway, we deal with the catalogue part of the services. Somehow, we tried to make a mapping of all the unique services, because there are so many services that are provided as a reply to previous services. So, we are interested in identifying the number of unique services, so that later there is a standardisation of them for replication in the online system. At the same time, another complementary pillar to this is the part of ensuring the Once-Only principle, which comes and basically talks about what interoperability means and identification of all basic registers at national level, necessary in forming electronic services and practically ensuring communication between these registers in order to provide services in an easy way to the citizens, without asking them for information that the State already has about them.

And on top of all this comes the 4th degree of sophistication component, because in what digitalisation means, we are talking about several degrees of sophistication. Degrees 4 and 5 of sophistication – basically where we talk about what payment facilitation and User Centricity mean – are about ensuring the payment component, related to services or implicit fees in certain processes provided within certain services. This is where *ghiseul.ro* comes into play, where we tried to accommodate the payment of all such tariff fees, including duties and taxes and so on, in order to be able to have a full spectrum. And all these subsequently come framed in the context of the governmental cloud and, of course, of the rest of the initiatives carried out by the other institutions, namely the Ministry of Internal Affairs or the Ministry of Labour or the Ministry of Justice, where

practically each of them tries to implement some sectoral service hubs, so that things are very well mapped on what means dedicated sectoral level. Then, within these mappings, things can be ensured from the point of view of interoperability in a very clear way defined by some central points.

These are, by and large, the current prospects.

Now, from an innovation point of view, it is clear that, at the moment, at least from the studies that we have carried out on determining the digital competence framework, it is, I must say, a de facto situation that is a little alarming. Why do I say this? Because in the area of digital skills, Romania is somewhere very far away. In fact, the average age in public administration is somewhere over 45 years old, which is a little worrying from the perspective of openness, open mindfulness and so on, and it is very difficult from the point of view of changing the structure of the person at such an age. Once one is formed in a certain way, it is quite difficult to come up with a new curb and try to induce an opening, new approach to what is new and trendy. And then, the studies we have carried out show that the medium to advanced digital skills level at the moment is somewhere around 3% at the level of public administration. The rest is somewhere in the basic or below basic area, which is a major problem in the current context, in which everyone is talking about digital stuff everywhere.

Now, at ADR level, we have tried to support and introduce in the functions of the COR [*Classification of Occupations in Romania*] the function of “Governance Expert” and what this would entail. We tried to introduce this position of “Governance Expert” starting from some needs that we encountered along the way. One of them is the fact that, in most of the public administration, everything is outsourced, people in the public administration choose outsourcing. Anything that means development of services, information systems and so on, are put up for tenders, to be implemented by the private environment. Nothing wrong with all this, except that, from an operational point of view, I can tell you that it is a real problem when the private sector comes to implement something, but has no one to talk to, technically, at institutional level. Then, this function of “Governance Expert” should normally somehow provide, so to speak, the business analyst part. “Governance Expert” should be the one who can best understand, from a functional point of view, what the institution in which the activity itself takes place implies, what needs to be digitalised. Moreover, the “Governance Expert” should be the one who can ensure a common language, both technical and legislative, so that demand meets supply in a constructive way.

Besides these things, I think we have put quite a lot of things within this position of “Governance Expert”, so there are debates about what else he/she should do. It is clear that he/she should provide quite a few things, so that we can ensure some optimisation, but, in the end, it is only a function. It now remains under discussion what would be the optimal level of such functions for each institution, in relation to the activity it carries out. Furthermore, this function should implicitly come with some other additional functions, which understand, and can communicate with maybe a developer, a programmer, a system architect, it depends. Maybe it would be good to internalise what the business analysis and design part means and to outsource only the actual execution part. Now, the debates on this are diverse. From my point of view and what I promoted within my entire experience was the idea of internalising as much as possible in order to have in-house know-how and not to depend on various contractors who can be changed or not properly transfer know-how from one to another for various reasons.

That is why, at the moment, when it comes to digitalisation within public institutions, I do not agree to outsource the designing and building of these processes. I would like somehow in the future to have such an institutional capacity that would allow for the “design” part to be in-house and the “build” one to be outsourced. Because under such circumstances, one can go through the process naturally, no matter how long or difficult that might be, in order to accommodate the needs on all institutional levels, in a real, grounded way, without having the pressure of a contract or anything. And so, by the time the execution or implementation come along, things should go in a seamless manner because we would have a very mature design. Whereas in the process of design and build, an initial design part is made, after which it moves to the build phase, after which it returns to the design phase, depending on what happens, functionally speaking, so as to reach a mature design solution. If we had the design part internally incorporated, then

things would be much more mature in terms of implementation and there would most likely be a much faster implementation process, from my point of view.

But this would really come with two major aspects. The first one is to internalise some private-level functions both functionally and financially. That is, the state should start to become competitive with the private environment in terms of this spectrum of human resources and be able to compete equally in terms of financial attractiveness, which at the moment unfortunately is, at least in this IT area, a little deficient in the public sector. It is very difficult to find an IT intern, because we cannot offer an IT intern more than 3000 RON (approx. 600 EUR) as a public entity, but, in the private sector, an intern can earn up to 1500 EUR. It is somehow a Don Quixote's fight, so to say.

This would be, so to speak, in general, the overview vis-à-vis what digitalisation means. Now, with this mechanism of NRRP, things have begun to be taken much more seriously by institutions on what this aspect of digitalisation means, and it is therefore no longer just a fashionable word within public discussions. People begin to understand the need for it, maybe, on the one hand, due to the lack of human resources with regard to what it means to provide and support such services, but also, on the other hand, from the point of view of the era we live in and of the requirements at cross-border level. Now I am at your disposal regarding any other specific questions you want to address. This introductory speech served more as an overview regarding the activity we carry out within ADR.

Interviewer:

Thank you for your broad introduction! It was perfect, because you ticked off the first contextual questions. Therefore, I am glad that our conversation commenced with what are the exact challenges and needs that ADR is responding to. However, now that we have this overview, I would like to go a little deeper into the subject, namely, to shift our attention closer to the motivations and decisions that have led to all these reconfigurations of the public entities dealing with digitalisation. I know that every institutional reform aims to respond in some way to a need or perhaps pressure on a certain domain. I understood that NRRP was probably the spark that ignited the digitalisation need, or made the governors realise that digitalisation is an important aspect, but I was wondering if maybe there were some other conditions, for instance, some institutional or technological deficiencies or market pressures, that played a role in initiating all these institutional changes.

Respondent:

There are certainly institutional shortcomings. Exactly because, over the years, things have been developed in an insular way. Digitalisation really has not been from the perspective of a collaborative ecosystem. Digitalisation was viewed by each institution in the way that they had to do something just for them, internally. Starting from this pattern, over the years, institutions have developed a system for each thing, but they failed taking into account the need for collaboration between their system and other systems, vis-à-vis other services they provided or between other institutions. Starting from this, we have now reached the point where everyone wants and talks about what transparency, data reuse, interoperability and so on means. On the one hand, in order to be able to do all these things, it is necessary that, within each institution, or let us say relevant central authorities (ministries), an overview should be made regarding what each institution means: from what services they provide to which computer technologies have been used and so on.

A first step in this process was the Digital Agenda's 2014-2020 strategy. Within that strategy, there was an analysis of feasibility in which an attempt was made to make the AS-IS analysis of the de facto stage, from various points of view. From (1) a legislative point of view, (2) a technical operational point of view, (3) a governmental and institutional architectural point of view, and from (4) the point of view of what needs to be done in the future so that things are functional. Starting from these points, the policy I was talking about in the beginning emerged. Practically, the policy pointed out what should be done within each central authority (line ministries and their sub-subordinated or coordinated institutions). Starting from these principles and laying them over with what the legislation on interoperability or data reuse means, or what the Governmental Cloud perspective means, it is clear that some shortcomings have emerged. However, the biggest problem by far, in this case, is the administrative expense, the financial administrative burden, regarding the maintenance of all these insular IT solutions that

have been built on currently outdated technologies. Additionally, these insular, outdated solutions should be technically rewritten to new current parameters in view of interoperability approaches, the new perspective of migration to Governmental Cloud and so on. Additionally, the human resources dimensions of these outdated silo IT solutions should also be considered. At the moment, the part encompassing systems' administrations is also being, in most cases, outsourced: there is no ownership for the support part. In this case, precisely in order to optimise the costs regarding this part of maintenance, moving to governmental cloud is desired, as practically institutions will no longer own what hardware infrastructure means (money will no longer be needed for investment in such infrastructures). Instead, some software solutions will be developed that will be put into the physical architecture of the governmental cloud, which will be managed by the Special Telecommunications Service, together with Cyberint, SRI [*Romanian Intelligence Services*] and ADR, to ensure that everything is optimised. All these things will require a process of refactoring, of rewriting these systems. However, the most important thing is that any information system that will be developed from here on will be developed on the cloud-first principle. Development will no longer mean what it currently means, as there will no longer take place within the institutional in-house as physical infrastructure, precisely for cost considerations. Additionally, the physical maintenance part will be done in a centralised way, as well as the subsequent software development part, ensuring license upgrades and so on. We tried to optimise as much as possible, because the studies showed colossal annual costs regarding what it means to provide online services through the management of own physical infrastructures. And that is where this approach came from.

In addition to all this, of course, in the back, some things need to be done, let us say, some fine tuning that is far from interoperability, that is related to the data standardisation part, to integration aspects, institutional interconnection on various levels, so that things are smooth from head to toe. So, that is kind of where the need came up, so to speak, on the one hand.

On the other hand, you see now, I am going to be a little mean, but we have a two-headed organisation of public administration, comprised of the political factor and the administrative factor. What I mean is that always, the political factor shows maximum irresponsibility regarding what it means to ensure a baseline of continuity of things. At least from my perspective, half of the governing plan or political objectives, regardless of who is in power, regardless of the political party, should provide the minimum necessary for multiannual agreed public policies, because that is why they are called multiannual public policies. If I have a multiannual public policy, but you as a politician come and do not take into account those multiannual public policies, both from the point of view of what political mobilisation means to the institutions that have to operationalise it, but also from the point of view of creating the budget and budget allocation for those institutions, things will never become operational and every time we experience this feeling as if we are starting over.

I am very entertained by the examples that are given in Romania regarding Estonia. It is beautiful, but Estonia has the size of Bucharest alone. Everyone talks about this model, but, when it comes to applying it, nobody takes into account the first aspect that Estonians have done, namely the fact that the Prime Minister of Estonia together with all the cabinets have made a task force and created a united front and have followed the sectoral implementation to the bottom of what digitalisation means. We cannot talk about this because in our country digitalisation is a declarative priority. For example, if the Prime Minister, together with the Ministry of Finance, the General Secretariat of the Government and the Ministry of Internal Defence, would make a common front on digitalisation, things would be operational. Because if we look from the practical aspect of our country and from the experience I have, the biggest problems, clashes, so to speak, due to a reluctance to change, were coming especially from the Ministry of Internal Defense, in the Ministry of Finance, in the Ministry of Justice, and in the Ministry of Labour, the big 4 that cover most of the services. dedicated to the citizens. When we want to make a transformation of public administration, the 4 big players are reluctant to change and do not even cooperate with each other, so how can we achieve anything?

Interviewer:

I was wondering, now that you mentioned this reluctance to change, maybe this reluctance does come precisely from the fact that all these capacities regarding

digitalisation have been centralised, somehow, in a separate Ministry with its own Authority subordinated to it, and they are somehow waiting for the change to come from these two?

Respondent:

Indeed, it does, but from an operational point of view and from the perspective of what coincides with the vision of Governmental Cloud, the Governmental Cloud does not prohibit each sector from making its own cloud. Basically, we are talking about some nodes that are connected to a central nucleus. The approach from the perspective of services must be the same, so no one is against it; it is natural for each sector of activity to have a centralised core. But that does not mean that the next time you have created a centralised core, a hub of services on what your sector spectrum means, you do not have to communicate with the rest. After all, services all intersect with each other, whether we want it or not. If we only look at this from the perspective of: "Oh, I digitalised some stuff within my sector, I do not care about anything anymore", well, then one might discover one digitalised for absolutely nothing. There is a big problem here, and that is why I maintain my opinion that this is where mentalities need to be changed. The world needs to understand that if there is no communication, it is exactly like in a relationship. If you stop communicating in that relationship, at some point the separation ends up happening. While you live with the feeling that everything is fine, you wake up one day with everything going bad. And that is why I maintain that communication must be much more functionally oriented. Because now, unfortunately, the stakeholders are only caring about ticking off some things as principles, to make it look like they are doing something. And I always tell them, that if we are making the effort to make it look like something is happening, is not it better to actually make it happen? You are anyways putting half your energy into making it seem like something. Put in the rest of your energy and actually do it.

Interviewer:

Through this discussion you answered another question I had below regarding certain cultural factors in the Romanian administration. And of course, there were some cultural elements that you already mentioned, such as communication, the type of relationships between institutions and so on. But you also talked about deficiency at the institutional level and, therefore, a sort of technical pressure that came from within. I was wondering if broader external pressures, such as requirements, norms or expectations from the EU, because you mentioned the European Commission at the beginning of the interview, also played a role in initiating all these institutional changes. For example, do you think that the need to comply with certain standards and rules may have led to this restructuring?

Respondent:

Definitely. There is clearly a pressure from a legislative point of view or, better said, regarding what Romania's commitments mean, regarding what our participation as a Member State at the level of the European Union means. As mentioned, there are regulations that have certain deadlines for their implementation. Yes, we were talking about the Single Digital Gateway Regulation. That has a deadline at the end of this year and, if we do not reach that, this will trigger an infringement procedure, which in itself can attract very high costs for our state. In addition to what is provided in this Single Digital Gateway Regulation, the Once-Only principle, there are many other groups Romania is part of, such as SEMIC EU. Also, the participation part in what EIF [*European Interoperability Framework*] means. So yes, there are many more aspects, including the fact that Romania is also part of some working groups at the Commission level that come and put pressure on all these elements. It is clear that these external pressures are strong because, in the end, we knew it from the beginning very well: with Romania's entry into the EU, we have come to what means the direct application of European legislation through regulations. When Regulations appear, it is clearly viewed as a legislation that the state must implement, it is binding. It differentiates from directives, for which we have to wait for transposal or for rules to appear and so on. In the case of regulations, we are already talking about some concrete things that really put some pressures. Also, there are these financial pressures. We have some elements, on the one hand, such as the NRRP, which is an instrument of financial assistance. On the other hand, we also need to consider funding that the European Commission makes available to Member States, and which certainly creates additional pressure regarding what

legislative and functional harmonisation of the administrative apparatus at national level means.

Interviewer:

Do you think that these external pressures can also alter the cultural traits of the administration that I was talking about earlier?

Respondent:

It is a functional, generally human and systemic thing. The answer to your question is clearly yes. This change will surely come because whether you want it or not, you are faced with the fact that you have to accommodate certain things. And for this, maybe in the first phase you do it out of obligation. But later, along the way, it becomes part of who you are, of what you do. I view it as a parallel or analogous with what it means to be a child who goes through all cycles of education. While a person is in primary school, he/she learns certain things, although his/her focus is on games, free time and so on, yet he/she is obliged to learn certain things, not knowing that later those things will help him/her to be able to continue things in another way. This is cascading until the moment he/she gets his/her first job. The moment this happens, if he/she has the power to reflect on things, he/she will realise that in fact, all the things previously passed as baby-steps, whether he/she liked them or not, prepared him/her for a certain functional minimum necessary for the moment they reached the job market.

Similarly in this case, everyone wants us to achieve a level of financial stability at national level that is comparable to that of other Member States. Or to have a certain security, or to have secured a certain income that ensures a certain well-being. We find that in order to have all these things, we have to do a number of other things, whether we like it or not. So, it is clear that, indeed, maybe a little harder, with reluctance, but certainly in the end things will be changed, in terms of cultural-organisational perception.

Interviewer:

We are getting closer to the last two questions. Because we discussed, here, internal deficiencies versus the influence of external guidelines and values, I was wondering if we were to balance them, which one do you think would weigh more with regard to all these institutional changes?

Respondent:

Unfortunately, our nature as Romanians is a little lazy. So external pressures have played a fundamental role, so to speak, in accelerating the adoption of certain things and in the evolution of certain levels.

Interviewer:

Now that we have reached the end of the interview and, respectively, my last question, I would like to know: how do you think ADR contributes, together with the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation, to increasing the legitimacy or credibility of the government in promoting digital transformation?

Respondent:

That is a question that requires a broad answer. We, at the moment, are trying to fight some battles on several fronts. First and foremost, we try to ensure this level of organisational culture. We need to make institutions understand that as an institution, regardless of the type of service you provide, it is still a service. And the mentality should be more similar to the one in the private sector: how should I be more citizen-oriented, be more offering, be as well understood as possible and how to make the citizen understand as well as possible what I need from him in all this process?

All these things come based on studies vis-à-vis the implementation of the Services Directive, in which we have all kinds of recommendations on what data standardisation means. This year we also have a new law, which is Law No. 9. Law No. 9 stipulates that institutions have the obligation to provide information about these services that they offer, both on their own website and through the single-electronic contact point. The discussions we had in view of this challenge, so to speak, are of a cultural-organisational nature. We came and tried to explain it to the institutions that there must be a certain format for these services, respectively, to make a very clear and succinct description of the services they provide, so that the citizen understands in concrete terms what is happening - that is, what he will get from that service. On the other hand, they need to come out and say, in an explicit way, which are the steps that, let us say, both the citizen and the institution have to do in order to provide and complete that service and the deadlines allocated for each sub-stage. For instance, what are the supporting documents

they need and what are the forms used for those services? What are the remedies? What are the support mechanisms? All kinds of information that they should make available to the citizen for one to know the whole information ecosystem of that service.

This idea of an electronic single point of contact was implemented by us since 2009. Edirect.gov.ro eGovernment, this is exactly the concept, that within it there should be all a sectoral one-stop-shops, so that inside it the information is provided according to a certain pattern and to have a constant updating. This is one of the steps we are trying to take, to change this part of the organisational culture.

Second, we try to take steps on what digital literacy means, or the development of digital capacities, skills. That is what we tried via the study we conducted. We tried to test all the skills given by the European Commission, as they are provided at Commission level. We tried to test them in a way that could be harmonised with what our spectrum of public administration means. It was really only centrally done, so therefore at the level of central administration. The test lasted an hour and a half, with anonymised tests. Thus, we did not collect any information whatsoever that could be reused of the people or of the institutions. Our goal was to derive some measures and recommendations for institutions with a view to improving skills or digital practices within each organisation. Somehow, also on the organisational cultural side, we engaged in this endeavour too.

On the other hand, we try to go into the area of what interoperability means because, as I said from the very beginning, ADR is appointed as coordinators on what interoperability means, on what the governmental cloud means, on what this part of Single Digital Gateway means, on the part of what the Services Directive means and on very, very many legislative aspects at the level of the *Acquis Communautaire*. From this point of view, maybe ADR also needs a much larger structure, human resources who are much better qualified, and in a much larger number. Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to work on all these aspects in public administration.

Now, on another level, we keep trying to minimise this dysfunctional impact of the political sphere in the administrative act, vis-à-vis what I was talking about earlier, to ensure and bring to the attention of the political, permanently, the policies or public European documents that must be taken into account in everything that means the governing act, regardless of who is in power. And for this, all kinds of committees have been set up at the government level. Currently, there is a dedicated committee, made at the initiative of ADR with the General Secretariat of the Government on digitalisation. The abbreviated name of the committee is CERB [*Committee for eGovernance and Reduction of Bureaucracy*]. Through it, we managed to make and give the final form of public policy that is valid until 2030, with the acceptance of all public institutions. That public policy was not a document that was made by ADR through a project with an external consultant, but it was made with all central public administration institutions, in which all these elements that we were discussing about were analysed – interoperability, governmental cloud, Single Digital Gateway, centralised portal, institutional cooperation and so on.

We have somehow tried to implement various instruments or to ensure various mechanisms, so that we can carry out in a qualitative way the duties that the authority has and must do. Now, from another point of view, ADR carries out a lot of diligence in this part of human resources as well. As I was telling you, we introduced in the occupational family that COR code of “Governance Expert”, which is something we have been fighting for since 2017. Also, we are somehow trying to obtain an exception regarding the remuneration of IT technical staff within public institutions so that we become competitive with the private environment and become able to attract human resources that are of quality and with which we can work in a much, much more operative way. These are, so to speak, the levels on which ADR tries to contribute internally.

Externally, as I previously said, we are part of various working groups in various areas, starting with the Digital Single Market, now reaching to what Digital Decade means, also on the Interoperability side, on the Electronic Signature Side. We are currently part of the e-wallet pilot project. We are engaged, so to speak, from this external spectrum, in almost all areas of interest regarding digitalisation, and we cooperate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, we cooperate with the Ministry of Justice, with the ONRC [*National Trade Register Office*] in the area of what legal entities mean as authentication and we try to accommodate this part in the future. We collaborate with what it means the private environment, regarding qualified signature suppliers, where the authority also plays the

role of supervisory and accreditation body of qualified electronic signature suppliers, where we also implement eIDAS nodes, through the SITUE project. So, to put it this way, we try to carry out all the diligences, on all levels, to transpose digitalisation from words into concrete facts.

Interviewer:

That was such a comprehensive conclusion! I want to thank you once again for your time, for your willingness to engage in this discussion, and for sharing with me your perspectives, experiences, and vision. I will stop the recording now.

Interview No. 2 – CODE: P2
Documented on 26/06/2023, 6 PM
Duration: 34 minutes

Interviewer:

Now I have started the recording. I would first like to thank you for taking your time for this interview. As I have presented myself before the recording has started, I would ask you to please provide me with a short presentation of yourself, with maybe a description of your responsibilities or role within your organisation.

Respondent:

Hello, my name is [...], and I am a public policy expert focusing lately on the digitalisation area of administration, smart cities, and other such stuff in the digital sphere. I am happy to help, and I am looking forward to your questions!

Interviewer:

Great. My first questions would be, knowing that you have quite a bit of experience within the realm of public policy developed at the central level, what do you consider having been the needs, challenges or significant events related to digitalisation that motivated the Government to consolidate/establish the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania, respectively Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation?

Respondent:

Well, the Authority was established in 2020 and took over a series of activities from the Agency for the Digital Agenda of Romania and two of the departments within the Ministry of Communications and Information Society, which was abolished, and its services redistributed to the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation. The need for digitalisation was, and still is, increased in the Romanian administration, but some of the major projects such as Ghiseul.ro, eLicitatie, digitisation of ANAF [*National Agency for Fiscal Administration*] and major life events, were somehow always deprived of ownership and coordination.

Although initially placed under the responsibility of the Prime Minister, ADR [*Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania*] was subordinated in 2022 to the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation. If initially at ADR there had to be leadership and coordination of all information systems or applications regarding digitalisation in public administration, services for citizens, strategies on digitalisation, governmental cloud, and so on, ADR no longer has this prerogative independently, but only with the consent of the Ministry of Digitalisation [*MRID*]. The ADR captured from MCIS [*Ministry of Communications and Information Society*] the Technical and Economic Committee for the Information Society, which had attributions in approving projects with a value of over 500,000 euros, and the non-functioning of this committee led to blocking any large-scale project in the public IT&C area.

I think that the rationale behind the creation of this authority was inspired by successful practices in Estonia and Denmark, where such agencies have even produced major changes in terms of digitalisation. Now, the NRRP has specific objectives related to digitalisation, which fell within the scope of ADR, so it may have been considered necessary at political level to have tighter control both over the available budgets and over the results obtained, considering that a Ministry or a Minister has more "weight" in this regard.

Moreover, a National Council for Digital Transformation has recently been operationalised within ADR, which, unlike the previous Technical and Economic Committee, functions as a partnership between state institutions, the private environment, and the academic environment, with an advisory role. The Technical and Economic

Committee had prerogatives to approve the documentation related to the various IT systems needed in various branches of the administration to ensure interoperability. It is not certain that the Technical and Economic Committee is still functioning, there is no transparency regarding the opinions requested and/or approved.

Interviewer:

Thank you for this brief overview. It was indeed very comprehensive. But I am wondering now, what do you think were the objectives pursued by creating these two institutions?

Respondent:

The establishment of ADR made sense from the perspective of grouping this area of maximum interest [*digitalisation*] under a single responsible umbrella. Placing it under the coordination of the Prime Minister provided it with reasonable weight and gave it major importance. Placing it under MRID seems to me to be nothing more than a political move, driven by the need to control the funds coming through NRRP and operational programmes. This is because MRID is rather concerned with the research and development area, the competencies in the digitalisation area remain at ADR. In my opinion at least, I do not identify any technical rationale related to any efficiency and effectiveness. It would have been more logical for MRID to absorb ADR as a general directorate in the Ministry.

Interviewer:

That is a very interesting perspective. But, given the fact that we must, so to say, speak about them together since one of them subordinates to the other, how do you think the creation of a Ministry, but also of an authority dedicated to digitalisation, addresses the existing vulnerabilities or gaps? For instance, are these two institutions contributing to a more resilient and inclusive digitalisation agenda?

Respondent:

Well, we can say that an Order of Minister carries more weight than an Order of an Agency President. Maybe here is one of the benefits. Otherwise, from my point of view, regardless of the title of the institution that creates, implements, pursues, or adjusts the policy on digitalisation, as long as it is mandated by law to do so and is allowed to do its job professionally, then digitalisation will also be resilient, inclusive, adaptable to any new changes of any kind. I think that the professional quality of the people in the system who deal with this aspect is the rather important aspect, how well prepared and connected they are, how motivated they are, so to speak, intrinsically, professionally. I do not speak about salaries, although these are also important. In the end, it is up to how motivated they are to really do a good job, done responsibly, durably, and sustainably.

Interviewer:

Thank you. Now that we have talked a bit about the climate, let us say, of the central administration, I was wondering whether you think that economic conditions, market pressures, or perhaps institutional weaknesses played a role in initiating this structural reform? And of course, why?

Respondent:

Digitalisation, eGov, the Governmental Cloud are extraordinarily present buzz words in public discourse nowadays, but besides a top-down approach – from policy level, specific regulation –, a bottom-up approach is also needed. Simply digitising the documents of an institution is in vain, since most often this means transposing them into pdf, as in MySMIS, related to the management of European funds, or SEAP, where documents are uploaded in scanned format, difficult to operationalise, because you will not have the real benefits of digitalisation. If the law of operation of an institution, internal regulations and procedures provide for cumbersome work, on paper, with manual signatures and physical stamps, their transmission and transformation into pdf is almost irrelevant, especially if you subsequently have to submit them in their original format to the registry of the institution. Moreover, in most of the cases, all hard copy in originals are required for verification.

On the other hand, I remember an example from the early 2000s when a hospital in a municipality piloted the implementation of a SAP system, in a pilot project of the Ministry of Health. It cost a lot of money, a lot of effort, things were done “by the book”, and in the end the system could identify inconsistencies, embezzlements. So, the hospital

manager was then overwhelmed with criminal files, controls and checks throughout the hierarchical chain. On the one hand, that was a good thing. On the other hand, this pilot was not continued, SAP was completely dropped in hospitals.

I fear that an accelerated advance in the area of digitalisation and streamlining of procedures, inputs/outputs, expenses, chain of signatures and approvals and assumptions is unlikely, yet desirable because it could reveal some deficiencies and "holes" in the various procedural systems that would lead to many of the heads of various institutions falling.

Also, the internal reluctance regarding digitalisation in the central public administration, from the lowest hierarchies to the highest ones, is very high, and I believe that the digitalisation of processes will be both the most important stage in this approach and the hardest to achieve.

Interviewer:

But what about, for instance, wider external pressures, such as EU requirements, norms or expectations? Do you think they played a role in initiating reform? For example, to what extent has the need to comply with international standards and norms led to this institutional restructuring?

Respondent:

I believe that external pressure is the biggest mobilising factor in our society, especially since it often comes with funds in various forms. However, it is not a guarantor of success or achievement. Let me give you an example: we have digitised the management and monitoring process of the implementation of projects from European funds for more than 10 years, through SMIS/MySMIS. The grant application is elaborated and transmitted electronically through the system, with various deficiencies indeed, but it exists. However, for years, processes and procedures at management system level through guidelines, instructions, internal procedures at the level of intermediate bodies, first modalities of verification and control at the level of the Court of Auditors or Audit Authority, and so on, require that technical reports, reimbursement/payment requests, target group registers, other implementation documents, despite the fact that they are available in electronic format in MySMIS, to be provided in hard copy format, with signature and stamped. They also ask sometimes for them to be transmitted in at least 2 copies to various authorities, creating an excessive and unjustified administrative burden. And so, what is then the point of this digitalisation? At the level of external pressures, we are digitalised in certain fields, whereas at the level of internal use, we still operate on paper. Then what is the benefit to the population? Let me tell you. Extremely low, towards zero.

Interviewer:

Thank you for your comprehensive explanation! But, if you were to balance the two types of pressures mentioned, which do you think would weigh more heavily in terms of the reform decisions of the two institutions concerned?

Respondent:

It is difficult for me to tip the balance, although I would rather tend towards external pressure.

Interviewer:

I understand. On the same line of argumentation, do you think that observing successful examples, for instance, of digitalisation initiatives in other countries, influenced the decision to establish such specialised institutions in Romania as well?

Respondent:

Of course, consultancy projects in various fields of central public administration abound in analyses on examples of good practice from other countries, but they are rarely customised to the realities of Romania. Such like for instance the examples of Estonia and Denmark in terms of setting up an Agency with overview in the digitalisation area that I earlier mentioned. This would then come bundled with other systemic measures, on all branches, with impact on digitalisation. Simply setting up an agency or assuming a strategy or policy does not solve a problem if all facets of it are not addressed.

Interviewer:

Since we are talking about the features of the public administration, do you think there is a culture or some defining factors of the central administration in Romania? And if yes, what would those be?

Respondent:

The lack of transparency, not only that of the administration to the public, but also of ministries among themselves, of departments within a ministry among themselves. There is a very entrenched silage at both inter and intra-institutional levels. “It is my data, why should I give it to you? Why should another ministry benefit from my work in my ministry?”. There is no overview of a problem, whatever that may be. Information, actions, are extremely fragmented by areas of interest.

“It is not within my competence” is a common line. Lack of ownership is another ingrained element. Lack of performance evaluation, at individual level, at the department level, at the institution level, conducted in a real, honest way, with a constructive focus. Whether one works on what one is supposed to do, whether one does not, there are no noticeable consequences. How many of the indicators or targets on the Agenda 2020 have been achieved by Romania? And if they did not achieve those, what happened?

Interviewer:

I would like to what we mentioned earlier. Do you think we have derived any of our reform motivations from inspiring from higher norms and values portrayed by the EU? And if so, do they have any chance in modifying the cultural traits of the administration you mentioned earlier?

Respondent:

I think they can modify it temporarily and unsystematically, until we pass the gap, whatever that gap may be. I have been working for 15+ exclusive years with the central public administration in Romania. Culturally, I do not see any difference now, compared to 2007 when I started. At the technical, non-management and lower management level, they are approximately the same people, in whom I do not see any developments in attitude, responsibility, knowledge, efficiency, effectiveness, despite many training programmes, many exchanges programmes, increased exposure to the international environment, consultancy, etc. The “blemishes”, so to say, are the same. Worse still, it seems to me that the newcomers, the young ones, are slowly but surely taking over from the existing “blemishes”. It is kind of a vicious circle.

Interviewer:

Well, we have reached the end of our interview. My last question is quite a comprehensive one, as to conclude this whole topic of capacity reconfiguration. Therefore, how do you think ADR and the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation contribute to increasing the legitimacy and credibility of the Government in promoting digital transformation and developing an inclusive digital agenda?

Respondent:

Is it the last one? Time went fast. Well. ADR seems to have some very good professionals. Somehow, under his first President, Mr. Sarmaş, ADR won a place at the table of specialists in the field, from the private sector. It remains to be observed whether in fact, agendas, strategies, plans, policies will succeed in achieving their targets. I would really like to see an impact assessment of the activities from 2020 until now in this area. But I am referring to a real, professional, and independent impact assessment, whose approval should not be placed under the pen of the entity carrying out the evaluated actions.

Interviewer:

Now that we have reached the end of our interview, if there is something else you would like to add...

Respondent:

No, I think we pretty much covered it all on my side. Thank you!

Interviewer:

I want to express my gratitude and say thank you for all your time and availability. I will stop the recording now.

Interview No. 3 – CODE: P3
Documented on 28/06/2023, 3 PM
Duration: 52 minutes

Interviewer:

Okay, we are covered with the recording. First of all, I wanted to thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in this interview and also for answering my form. I had time to take a look at your answers and re-formulated some of my questions in light of what I

saw in there. Because I introduced myself before starting the recording of this meeting, I would like to give you the floor and I will ask you to introduce yourself, to describe your role within the organisation you come from and what connects you with this field of digitalisation in the public sector, or with the public sector in general.

Respondent:

Well, my name is [...], I am [...] of [...], a [...], which deals rather with finding bridges between the civic area and the public administration. I spent more than [...] years in public administration. I led the [...] of the Victoria apparatus for [...] years and then I was Secretary of State from [...] to [...], in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, or the General Secretariat of the Government. I dealt mainly with the online area and, collaterally, with the policy coordination part, including the digitalisation area. So somehow, I was connected to everything that happened, I was also a member of the Technical and Economic Committee, I was [...] of [...], so somehow the themes are familiar to me regarding everything that happened. Yes, I think that would pretty much be me in a nutshell.

Interviewer:

I will then start with some questions that will place us in the context of the research topic. I have seen that you evaluated the current start of digitalisation with a rather poor score, as well as the success of current digital initiatives in achieving their goals. You have also shown some pessimism about the future of digitalisation in Romania. However, I saw a little more optimism, so to say, when it came to ADR [*Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania*] and the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation [*MRID*], more precisely in the question that portrayed them as conducive factors for creating a favourable environment for innovation and digitalisation. Considering these answers, how do you think these two institutions address the vulnerabilities or gaps that currently exist?

Respondent:

I gave that a higher grade from a slightly broader perspective, in the sense that I was one of the supporters of coordination of the topic of digitalisation at the centre of the government. More precisely, a strong political leadership, for example, the Prime Minister, would have been the best to coordinate these efforts in our type of administration, with the additional help of a very strong technical leadership. ADR could have taken over this role.

There was also a moment when we had a Government CIO; we can also discuss history at some point. But the ADR would have had, in this combination, the Secretary General - Prime Minister - Direct Superior, the chance of better coordination, and that is why I gave those questions a good grade. The emergence of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation as an institution involved in this area, in my opinion, has ruined this architecture and has also ruined the dynamics of digitalisation.

I find the topic proposed by you very interesting, and also the angle is very interesting, and I really think that my poor grades and my distrust come primarily from this organisational set-up. I still believe that the government's centre coordinates better and can ensure stronger leadership.

But beyond that, I also reflected on the proposed topic: whether there were technical factors or other factors that determined this arrangement. I think that the political factor and the desire to distribute resources prevail. I think that unfortunately the political part in administration limits itself there. I think that is what changed this institutional arrangement rather than a desire to streamline. Obviously, the political discourse is towards efficiency, towards digital public services, but practically, this is not happening, and this is reflected also in the DESI [*Digital Economy and Society Index*] measurements. We can see this in many other things. Analyses of all kinds have been made, for example: how much European money has been put into information systems since 2007, their efficiency, how present they are, how coordinated they are. So, I think we can talk about it for days. I think things are still not laid out correctly and because they are not placed correctly, they will inevitably be burdened by inefficiency, because they will not be able to deliver things faster in this institutional arrangement.

Moreover, Romania is in a very strange position, meaning it is not among the European leaders of digitalisation and it is not as if we are fighting for the 3rd or 4th place and the finesse of institutional arrangements would make a small difference there and would help us become more competitive. This is not the case... Romania must catch up a lot in terms

of where we should be. From the perspective of digital education, but also from the perspective of digital public services, we are doing bad.

I think the secret is, always related to the type of coordination, and it also depends on a very strong leadership. In the case of Romania, we have none of them. Whether we are talking about Austria, Great Britain, Estonia, South Korea or New Zealand: when they wanted to focus on the topic of digitalisation, they made this leadership very obvious. Singapore, another example. We try anything but this mechanism, unfortunately. And I say it with the necessary detachment or, let us say, detachment given by the years I have not been there, but I am connected to the public sector still and I am not optimistic, precisely because of this. It is a longer answer, but I think you can extract what I meant.

Interviewer:

It is exceptional, because your long answer, as you describe it, helps me a lot with further analysis. The next question was actually related to political intervention in terms of digitalisation. And I know you mentioned in the form that, in Romania's case, the focus is on the political power of allocating resources. And I wanted to ask you to tell me more about how you see this allocation of resources. What is it, why is it important, and how is it related to the reconfiguration of these institutions?

Respondent:

There are two perspectives that I think are important in this conversation. First of all, in the Romanian administrative system, the organisational culture referred to in the form is a very verticalized one. I mean, it is very hierarchical and very insular. Ministry X has a domain, deals with it and communicates only when needed and when it has an interest with other ministries. And those interests have to align for that communication to happen. Otherwise, it is going to be very hard to get them to communicate. Or maybe they see potential for some kind of exchange between them. Let us say, ministry X wants something, and ministry Y wants some other thing, and there is some kind of exchange between them.

Otherwise, it does not work. So that is our organisational culture, and in this organisational culture, coming up with a vertical alignment, that is, a Ministry of Digitalisation, for a subject that is eminently horizontal, like digitalisation, does not work. It cannot work, because the Ministry as a vertical coordinator will always be forced to exchange something. If it needs an electronic service to be prioritised and put on a fast trajectory in order to be accessed by the public, it does not have the necessary tools. And then it leads to a solution like: "Okay, let us put some European funds there and a management authority, or an operational program that we can manage, then we direct some money, and that is my role as Minister; and then others can be concerned for the coordination of digital public services". That is kind of the mindset in this conversation. I referred only to the second part. The first part is much more important because that is the type of culture and unfortunately you cannot solve it with vertical coordination. So, with a coordinating Ministry of Digitalisation, there is no way it can work. And I said this to ministers who are also my friends and whom I know very well. So that is a problem because you must glue coordination onto an eminently verticalized and very insular system.

I think the desires then for institutional arrangement, whether it was ADR, or Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation, revolve around the same issue: who has more power to decide this distribution. And the power has continuously shifted since the establishment of the ADR and the Ministry: they made a balance, sometimes ADR had a several more attributions, sometimes the ministry had a little more attributions, and so on.

But in the sense of solving some things... We are at three years I think, 2-4 years almost, where we do not have a number of digital services available. We have made a new arrangement, let us see how effective this arrangement is. And here is another note, if you will, this is also missing. The fact that we do not measure. So, there is no culture of efficiency, in the sense that we made this arrangement as public policy, that is what the government's view was, no comment on that, it is a political decision, made, I guess based on important arguments. But let us look at a year, at 2-3 years even and see what we wanted to achieve with this. I mean, we did this to make digitalisation more efficient, right? OK, and how do we measure that efficiency?

They only talk about more services. Well, are they ever looking at what is in the government programmes? That never happens. Whenever a new government program is

coming, it promises the same things further. Okay, so how do we know when it is actually going to happen? So, these topics of measuring and assuming things politically come together. It is the topic of measuring the administration and the topic of political ownership within the area of political parties. So, given that given that this context we are in, and I have no reason to be optimistic.

Interviewer:

The fact that you talked about measuring efficiency makes me think of the fact that I originally intended this thesis to be on this topic. Meaning: would it be better to centralise digitalisation or decentralise it? But I was afraid that I would not have the resources to measure it with the publicly available materials.

Respondent:

I think a hybrid model of centralisation of coordination and decentralisation of execution would work best. I mean, the big ministries, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, are super important politically, and you cannot put conditions on them to do something unless you are at the centre of the government. Because the centre of the government has the necessary negotiating tools in this dialogue.

However, if one leaves the execution of digital services to these ministries, while explaining them that there are, let us say 10 services that we want to prioritise, where they can find the funds and instruct them to do them as they know best, there is no conflict with anyone. There is no problem. The moment they come as a public institution, whether they are a ministry or the centre of government, and say "No, no, no! I do the system and you are my customers", whatever it is called, Governmental Cloud or whatever, it does not work. And as a proof, the Ministry of Internal Affairs is making its own cloud, the Ministry of Finance is making its own data centre. Okay, and then where do all the investments go and how do they pursue them? Again, people focused a lot on spending some money as best they could in the given context, but not aiming for a very clear efficiency of things and hence the rest of the issues that unfolded afterwards. I think these are important things to remember, because that is our culture and that is what will continue to happen. I do not know if a new Prime Minister will come along and say: "Digitalisation is my no. 1 priority, and look, I appoint a technical person who has all my freedom and support to do things". It is not going to happen anytime soon, but there is still hope.

Interviewer:

This lack of congruence between principles, or priorities, from one governance to another has been mentioned before within the other interviews. In fact, I understood that it would not be a problem if each ministry makes its own cloud as long as it can be integrated to the larger Governmental Cloud.

Respondent:

Obviously, technology allows us to see that no matter how these systems have developed, they are still put under an integration umbrella. Whether it is API-based or whatever, it does not matter, because as long as we are talking about technologies, the issues can be solved. That is not the problem.

The big problem in public administration is trust, or let us say, reliability. This layer of trust must come from somewhere. Let me give you an example. Technically, the Ministry of Internal Affairs does not have a problem exchanging data with, I do not know, a local prefecture, for example, through the government cloud. It is not a technical issue, but a trust issue. "Who in prefecture X has access to that data? What if someone in prefecture X happens to misuse them, who will check that? Will the Ministry of Internal Affairs be responsible?". Neither the ADR, nor the Ministry of Digitalisation want to assume this responsibility, so then the Ministry of Internal Affairs Ministry would say: "I would better not give any data". And hence the big problems in implementation.

So, the problem is not technical, it is a trust-related problem, and this trust between institutions must be ensured by someone. Somebody has to come along and say: "Yes, I am the one who comes with this layer of trust". And, regardless of the institutional setup or technical arrangements of the platforms, this component has never been addressed. Or, at least, not seriously enough in the development of electronic services and especially in their coordination. The trust component is very important in this economy of things, because without it, it is very difficult to build interoperability if those who participate in interoperability do not trust each other. To build it, you have to start from trusting relationships that have already been built.

I want to give another example: that of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and of the Ministry of Finance. Regardless of the MRID or ADR, these formerly mentioned ministries have their own information-sharing protocols that developed over time. They were made on a technical level, but they were based on the confidence that both ministries have the mechanisms in place to ensure they do not misuse what they take from each other. It was more of a “gentleman’s agreement” rather than a big institutional set-up ethic. ADR cannot intervene in the relationships between ministries from its current placement; it cannot be a “middleman” and take over the relationship of trust. From the centre of the government, as it was initially placed, it could have indeed brought others around this relationship of trust, yes, this could have been done. But in a vertical coordination, as the current one, the ministry would have to place itself, with ADR in its subordination, and tell these two formerly mentioned ministries: “What you are doing is ok, but you also need to bring others”. Then, of course, the ministries would not understand what the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation and ADR have to do within their business, as they have made the consortium reliable only for that service that the two of them use and do not see it as their responsibility to bring other stakeholders in. This is the reality. I do not know how much people can see it from the outside, but from inside the government, this stuff can be seen very well.

We managed at the centre of the government to unlock many projects and many things just because we were neutral. We do not have a ministry. The Chancellery does not have a domain. The Chancellery just watches and wants ministries to get along; it has no stake in this game. The Chancellery only reports to the Prime Minister whether things are going well or not, whether what was supposed to happen happened and, in some cases, why it did not happen. This is the whole game and whoever understands this finesse of the coordination of relations within the government centre and other ministries, understands that the subject of digitalisation will not have chances of success or rapid advancement unless it is there, at the centre. Those are my arguments for now.

Interviewer:

Because you mentioned this lack of trust between the national, central level of public administration and the regional or local levels... Can we also talk about a lack of trust between ministries?

Respondent:

It is not about mistrust between ministries. When you are in public administration, there is no Ministry X or Ministry Y. The ministries are eventually just umbrellas that people are under. So, trust transfers to that area of people. There is an administrative component, because the institutions do not have clarity in their roles and tasks. Obviously, they know it by and large, and they have some laws that tell them exactly what they do, but on horizontal topics, such as digital transformation or digital public services, it is hard to say, for example: “The Ministry of Internal Affairs deals with digitalisation from here to here”. That is, they do not know exactly where the job of one ministry ends in terms of making available to other institutions, I do not know, for example, information about people. Where does his liability end? The government should do this on a broader level, which is to define it: “You have the role from here to here, from here on out, the others are responsible”. There is not really a conversation about trust and accountability, and who is accountable.

Politically, and I agree with them [*with the Ministry of Internal Affairs*], whenever there is a scandal, people will point their fingers at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, not at the ADR. And they know it, they have been doing it for years, you cannot get that out of their DNA. And it is a fact. It happened. Whenever there was a scandal related to identity cards or personal records, the world obviously pointed fingers, top of mind, to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In the news headlines like: “The Ministry of Internal Affairs’ database of population records has been hacked” appeared. That is an issue.

This layer of trust has not been approached from a regulatory perspective either. It could be, up to a point, approached from the standards side, that is, to decide that these are the standards, this is how to expose the data, how to retrieve it, these are the secure data transfer protocols, this is who is going to make sure that these protocols are followed, and everyone must comply with these standards. There should be a layer that says who is a user and what rights they have, also who is auditable. We do not have any such mechanisms in place. Instead, we are just talking about digital services and how to link databases.

In the absence of such mechanisms and such a layer, it is very complicated. So, we need a trust layer, and standardisation. There are many things that are not even put on paper, there is something in the law of interoperability, there is a beginning, but that is about it. Nothing is set in stone.

Interviewer:

I would like to go back a little bit to the main factor you defined, which is the political factor. You talked about the whole resource allocation thing. At the end of the day, I think resources are more or less linked to the EU, right? So, what impact do you think the EU rules, standards and requirements, which I also mentioned in the form, have had? Do you think they weighed in any way on the decision to reform these institutions?

Respondent:

In general, yes. In general, the European component has forced some things. And now, it is the only hope in this plan. For example: the famous NRRP. The fear of not meeting milestones, of causing political harm, makes things happen. Some of that happened. The problem that you cannot see, and it is about our deeper relationship with the EU in terms of administration, is that the administration has been used to ticking things off the list and not doing them deeply. So, the target becomes, because they are all getting very urgent, to tick off that we have done milestone X. What does that involve? Well, let us pass three laws, make some rules, make purchases, and so on. We forget the bigger purpose, including the NRRP, the reform part. What reform must we accomplish? This? Good. And there are some steps towards that reform. Have we followed them or only checked them out off the list and pretended they have been achieved, although just superficially? Yes, NRRP is a very good plan, we stick to it, we respect the milestones and so on, but we have to compensate with other things. That is, one cannot reform only on the digitalisation area or only 10 services or 20 services and the other services are to be forgotten. No, let us see how we can help make those 20 services happen faster. And this reform should be achieved from institutional arrangements to public collateral policies in Romania. For example, and this is another real fact: we invest a lot through NRRP in digital electronic services, but we live in a context in which the population is very poorly educated digitally. So, inevitably, this will double or even triple the costs. They need to have a conversation out on this, and this needs to be supported. That is, to say "OK, from NRRP, how much do I have for digital education, how much do I have for digitalisation? What are the services? OK, I know what I am doing, let us see how we bring others to do such services so that demand is so strong that services are later kept up to date and other services are brought along with them". But their thinking is insular, meaning everyone deals with their own field. NRRP digitalisation is treated as NRRP digitalisation, and NRRP education is seen as NRRP education, they are treated separately. That is why I say that the lack of coordination at the centre is important. A ministry will never be able to coordinate topics horizontally. It is difficult. It is impossible. I mean, there are very few examples, and only in crisis situations, that have worked.

Coming back to the question, European pressure is important. I hope they will also pressure regarding what will happen with each strategic roadmap that each country should propose as part of the Digital Decade, in which they need to link the DESI part, the measurement part, to a much more applied plan as to reach those targets. And Europe has seen that yes, we measure year after year, but the fact that we see that we score poorly in analyses and yet do nothing does not make us any better. So, we also have to come up with a plan to treat our problems. And I think the fact that there will be pressure on the states from the EU (and I hope there will be more and more pressure) will force some things to happen.

Like I said, on an axis of digitalisation improvements, the line will go up. In Romania, even now the line is ascending, but it is at a very small slope compared to where it should be. I mean, if the target is to have all public services digital by 2030, I do not know where we are and how we will get there. I mean, the slope cannot be: "We are going to do three services this year and five more next year", because that is not how it works. There must be another rhythm of achieving things, which currently does not exist.

And I think only European pressure will help things here. But we will need to compensate it from the political leadership perspective, the centre of government. If NRRP is coming, this component of roadmap strategies, and other European funds come, well, let us take advantage of them to change some things in the administration more deeply. Because the digital services part does not only have a front end, but it also has a

back end that needs to be changed at the level of flows, processes and so on. Or that, again, is rarely addressed.

Interviewer:

But if we were to balance the EU pressures that you mentioned earlier, and maybe some higher values, norms, and good practices that potentially served as an inspiration for reform, which do you think weighed heavier in the choice of this reform?

Respondent:

In drawing the current framework, the current institutional arrangement?

Interviewer:

Yes.

Respondent:

I think the European funds' part. That is, the political context was as follows. The proposal to re-establish the ministry or to receive this component was brought by those from the USR [*Save Romania Union political party*] into the right-wing coalition that came in 2019, if I am not mistaken. Then they proposed this ministry. I said it was a mistake, but they proposed it with the thought that through the future NRRP, whose subject they knew very well, and through the ministry set up by them... So, they knew that the subject would be there, and then they said, they had to deal with this subject and set up this ministry to coordinate. So, somehow, it was that ideal mix between "We know some money is coming" – so European pressure, somehow, and "We know we will also have power there that we need to distribute". Because there is no other argument for this component of digitalisation to not be taken to the centre of government, or not being left as the ADR was then, with increased powers. ADR had full force back then. Those were, I think, the arguments.

But things turned out to be much more complicated in practice. For a single ministry to function, it must have a government decision, so... You have Parliament, it was voted that there is a new ministry called the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation and you must have the government decision that specifies what ministry does. It took three months for that decision to be made. Well, that alone says a lot about how politically and administratively important this element of digitalisation was. And then, it was again the pressure component, because they had NRRP and they must have done something to clarify the role of MRID and its attributions, because otherwise I think it could have taken even longer than 3 months. So somehow it was exactly the ideal mix that ruined, in my opinion, the trajectory that the ADR had taken. So yes, in my opinion, the ministry's creation ruined the path that the ADR was taking.

The ADR was an authority, so it could have had independence, it had the whole process of coordination and closeness to the Prime Minister. What ADR did not have: it did not have the institutional capacity to do things. ADR had no people. But this could be solved, somewhat quickly, but also with strong political will. Unfortunately, it did not happen. Then the pandemic came, and things settled like that. So, no one else dared to give up this newly created ministry. However, the arrival of Sebastian Burduja was a very good thing for the topic of digitalisation, in the sense that it gained notoriety, it was seen much better. However, in terms of results... I would be more reserved.

Interviewer:

You do not think that maybe, I do not know, all this pressure I was talking about, from the EU... Because I saw that your answer in the form is quite pessimistic about the fact that this external pressure could change administrative cultural features. Should I understand that you do not believe in the possibility of a change in culture in light, or because of this pressure?

Respondent:

There is no way. There is no way. I mean, pressure alone cannot change the culture. Politicians stay way too short in office to undertake a profound change in administration. The administration knows these things and because of this, they will only strive to do things superficially, as they have done so far. We will tick the boxes, without making any deeper reforms, as we should.

It hurts me because, politically, European funds are a very powerful instrument. People are sensitive to it and if they see that you do not spend them or that you have little absorption, they say: "Look, Romania does not benefit from funds". Thus, it induces the idea that we have money and do not know how to spend it, and so on. You have a powerful tool at your fingertips that helps you to reform things, to do them differently.

Things are not as complicated as they seem in changing organisational culture. I know it seems like a huge effort, because there are so many people, so many institutions, so many structures and so on. But there are a few things that can be done that would put things in a different light. There is a lot to talk about here. I will give just one example. For instance, the fact the administration is not very citizen-centred, but rather self-centred. The administration thinks in terms of solving its own problems, and it does not care about the citizen waiting at the counter. The citizens, as customers, can easily come back because they need the services of administration.

I have stated it repeatedly as an example and I will say it again. If the ADR or the Ministry or the Prime Minister or whoever is in this area, would put up a list of all public services, their degree of sophistication and the term that each institution assumes until it passes into a higher degree of sophistication, the things will already be different. Then surely the pressure shifts from the centre to those who deliver these services. And then, the demand will be reversed. They will come to the centre for help, for money, and so on. So, you create leverage to make it happen. Right now, you do not have that. It is left, somehow like this: we have a ministry, it coordinates, it has attributions, it comes to the government meeting, and that is it.

Interviewer:

Is it for the same reasons you stated in the form that you think that the two institutions do not contribute to increasing the legitimacy and credibility of the government in everything that means promoting digital transformation?

Respondent:

In order to be able to make digital services, to be able to transform digitally, you must, first of all, promote the idea of digitalisation. Let the world want it. Let the world know that it makes their lives easier, that it makes their life better, that, I do not know, something, anything!

From this perspective, I cannot blame them, because both the Ministry, and Minister Sebastian Burduja in particular, and the ADR, especially when Sabin Sarma was there, did this. So, they pushed things to a certain level of notoriety. They strived to do some projects, they strived to do certain things. They were visible, they were in the press. But that is only one part of what is going on.

You cannot just say, "You know, digital services are going to be great". You need to tell the citizens what those services are about. Out of all the services, I see ghişeu.ro, which, do not get me wrong, it is great that it happened. And look, I see that the number of transactions has increased and so on and that I can use some things. But the great service that they announced, the one with which one can get one's own criminal record electronically, in fact, is not done in ghişeu.ro, but in another platform that belongs to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. But they [*ADR and the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation*] made sure they went out in the press and said that they did it. I mean, I do not know how this stuff is looked at from outside of the administration, but it is for real. So, even though people have worked for a year to make this service available at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the first to come out in the press were the Minister of Digitalisation and ADR. Mind blowing. Ok, fair enough. That is it, it is happening, it is good that it happens even in this manner, and it increases notoriety, as I said, and the world is announced about this digital endeavours. But again, I must go into ghişeu.ro and see something new. I mean, this part of promoting the idea of digitalisation is cool. But beyond that, we also need results. I mean, you cannot just shake hands and say that is that. I get it that making a show is catchy and feeds the public's appetite, but...

Interviewer:

We reached the end regarding my questions. I want to thank you once again for your time, for engaging in this discussion and for sharing with me your perspectives, experiences, and vision on the whole topic of digitalisation in our country. If you have anything else that you would like to add...

Respondent:

No, thank you, I think I pretty much covered it all. And you are welcome! It was my pleasure and I hope it will help you in your analysis.

Interviewer:

Also, if you have another colleague from the public sector who you think would be willing to offer me an interview and with whom you could put me in touch, that would be very helpful. But until then, I wish you good luck and I want to tremendously thank

you once again for all your time, especially since we exceeded the initially estimated one. I am going to stop recording now.

Interview No. 4 – CODE: P4
Documented on 01/07/2023, 2 PM
Duration: 42 minutes

Interviewer:

The recording is on. As I said, you can start with a brief presentation of yourself.

Respondent:

[...], consultant and political analyst, working since [...]. So somewhere around [...] years of experience in the field of counselling and consulting. When I say counselling, I refer to counselling in the public sector, and I am also an expert in International Affairs. Moreover, I offered counselling to one of the former Presidents of the Chamber of Deputies, I was a National Security advisor, counsellor within the Government, and more. I had several hats, so to speak.

Interviewer:

And what connects you to the field of digitalisation?

Respondent:

Well, my experience is reflected in the pieces of advice, consultancy and recommendation given on digitalisation topics from the perspective of both commercial clients, who intended to enter the Romanian market and have connections with the state in this sense, especially from the perspective of recent digitalisation efforts. In addition to all this, I was not only the witness, but also among the most active participants in the digitalisation of political management decisions, both from the perspective of consultancy, from automation to the internet presence of stakeholders and consultancy in this regard. So, I offered analysis and advice on absolutely everything that meant the presence of dignitaries on the Internet and politicians in general, including the consultancy part on how to reach digitalisation and have a country as connected as possible to this strategic desire.

Interviewer:

Well, because you were at the centre of the digitalisation movement, so to say, I will ask you if you can first give me a brief presentation of the structural changes that led to the reorganisation of institutions in what we see today as ADR [*Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania*], respectively the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation [*MRID*]. What were the objectives pursued through all these reforms?

Respondent:

The story is broader, at least the story as I know it. What I know is that, in general, research was under-funded and was transferred, like a Cinderella-topic, from one Ministry to another. The digitalisation part was regarded as a requirement not only after the COVID pandemic, but also as a desire, a national strategic direction, because that is where the world is heading, and it would be good to be somehow...

Interviewer:

In line with the world's changes and visions?

Respondent:

Exactly. From this point of view, there were funds coming from the European Union through NRRP that kept this desire alive. Then we had the political desire for a structure to be placed on top of all those already existing, which was the ADR. Basically, we wanted to increase the importance of digitalisation at Ministry-level.

Interviewer:

Ok, good. But why all these moves, restructurings, and institutional reforms?

Respondent:

In what sense?

Interviewer:

In the sense that, for example, some digitalisation capacities were placed under the Ministry of Education, but some of them were also within the Ministry of Communications, after that it moved to...

Respondent:

And Transport.

Interviewer:

- Exactly.
- Respondent:** As far as I know there is a sum of interests, institutionally speaking. There are several institutions that have interest in this story. You have SRI [*Romanian Intelligence Service*] which is part of the defence of the entire system, you have STS [*Special Telecommunications Service*] which comes with the technique, meaning wires, pipes, and not only, and you also have the army and police who also have small elements there related to cybercrime, things like that. All of these are intertwined, but the point is that you have to have something to defend. There was no idea of the Governmental Cloud before, there was no idea of paperless office.
- And it all slowly came down to understanding that this need exists. And then, okay, well, what do we do? Well, we need the Governmental Cloud. Well, who can give us that? Well, Microsoft, Google or Amazon, they are the three big players. OK, and whose cloud is it? Well, SRI comes and says it does not want it, STS does not want it either. Okay, well, how do we do it? It came down to a whole discussion between institutions, from what I understood, which was based on who owns some servers.
- That is what the desire for digitalisation was. And [*Sebastian*] Burduja was a young minister, chosen to lead this strategic direction, but more to start it, because that is what actually happened when he came. Before him, things were quite clear and moving in a straight line. But in principle, when Nicolae Ciuca became Prime Minister, things changed a bit, from what I understand, and from there it took a little while to move forward.
- However, in the current situation we already have things happening and, by 2027, we will start to see things related to the Romanian state in relation to the citizen, taxes, taxes, ghiseul.ro, all that. Something like this existed in Ghita's time, at AS SOFT. However, it did not work. Somehow the infrastructure should have existed, but it was a big hoax. So, they started from scratch.
- Interviewer:** I understand. Good. This stuff happened and we ended up with an Authority for Digitalisation and with a ministry.
- Respondent:** The Authority existed before.
- Interviewer:** It existed, indeed, but not in its current format.
- Respondent:** Yes, well, okay, yes. You had the DNSC [*National Cyber Security Directorate*] that existed, there was where the authority was placed. Yes, indeed, it was raised at the ministry level.
- Interviewer:** Also, before, ADR was at the centre of the government. How do you think they aimed to approach all the existing gaps by reorganising and moving ADR under the Ministry? Do you think this approach is more effective in terms of addressing Romania's vulnerabilities regarding digitalisation?
- Respondent:** I think it is good that, at least, the drive, the effort for digitalisation somehow has placed all the elements under the same hat, because things are solved faster like this.
- In Romania there is not, and this is very important, there is not a lot of inter-Ministerial communication, even when it comes to Ministries led by the same political party. And then, out of pride, there is not a lot of communication. And then if you had the elements of digitalisation placed at different ministries, there would have been a problem. That is probably why they put it all together.
- Even so, there is a problem between the services and the civil side. You want to do a civil matter. I mean, it is a Google Drive, it is a simple thing, where people put their documents and there is a database with a common key, where if you put your data, you also see your taxes and other info. The problem is that it must be designed in such a way that not everyone gets to see inside it. This stuff generally comes easily, they do not have to reinvent the wheel.
- Not to mention, digitisation of the documents itself. There are states where work is done on the Internet and that is it, there is no paper anymore.
- Interviewer:**

You said it would be better maybe if all these digitalisation capacities were under the same umbrella. In previous interviews, opinions have been that it would have been better for the ADR to remain at the centre of the government and not be put under the umbrella of a minister.

Respondent:

Someone from the technical environment would probably say that. Someone who works in the public environment knows very well how difficult it is. And one more thing, there are also egos, which I mentioned earlier. One can be very well-intentioned and have very good inter-ministerial communication, but one wants this to be his or her project. There have been such issues even between the executive and Parliament.

The IT Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, as far as I know, is one thing and has other directions of operation than the ADR or the Ministry. Because there we would rather talk about political interests since there are a thousand egos and a thousand things to consider. Indeed, in Romania it is better to be an individual who rules absolutely everything, to be a “tsar” of that problem at hand. This is exactly how it should be in Romania, because otherwise there are too many competing interests, and nothing is actually done.

Interviewer:

But now, going back a little bit to the exact reasons for these institutional reforms... Do you think it was all about certain pressures of a rather technical nature, through which the decision-makers realised that it no longer works like that, and they were somehow constrained, or do you think it was rather about the inherent desire to align with the standards, norms and values transmitted by the EU?

Respondent:

No, so you basically had these funds that had to be put into something, because part of them were dedicated to digitalisation which did not really exist, so there was no other way... Romania could not get this money from anywhere else, and Romania will not ever have the money to do that [*digitalisation*] by itself. And that came with some milestones, some requirements, and so on. And somehow it also came as part of the EU’s strategy, with the green transition, but not so much.

I mean, there were no external pressures, it was all about: “Listen, if you want this money, you have to perform, you have to put some stuff into operation”.

And on the other hand, the result is rather a result of Romania’s accountability. Nobody asks Romanians for anything. Romanians are the ones who politically assume that they take political responsibility for this.

Interview:

I understand. You think it would rather be an internal desire to streamline digitalisation, conditioned somewhat by these European norms.

Respondent:

Yes, there were conditions, but... When you want to do good or modernise the country, you do not have to have a reason for that. Modernisation itself is the reason. And you see, that was not just a PNL [*National Liberal Party*] thing, but it was a movement in all the political parties. They all realised it was time for modernisation.

Interview:

Was this reorganisation inspired by some successful examples from other countries?

Respondent:

Yes. The main reference we have, which is indeed clearly superior, is the Republic of Moldova. As small and poor as it is, on the digitalisation side, they have done more, with infinitely fewer resources, than we, the big country next to them, managed in 10 years. Then, you have more examples, like Estonia, United Kingdom, and so on. Best practices are everywhere.

Interviewer:

Do you think the decision-makers were somehow inspired by them?

Respondent:

Yes, because we, in general, especially as part of the European Union, tend to go with the majority. And then seeing most of the countries, like England, Spain, Italy, France, Germany, we naturally try to go and follow their steps.

Interviewer:

Do you think there is a culture or some defining factors, not necessarily of the central administration, but of institutional reforms at the level of central administration?

Respondent:

Yes, we have several problems and challenges, so to speak, that are systemic. First, bad digital education. There are people who have Yahoo addresses in 2023 as well. We do not have this ethics of cleaning up digital life in any way. That is where we start.

We buy extremely expensive phones, but we do not use many of their options. Instead of choosing cheaper phones, which are doing the exact bare minimum that we need. If you do not have an expensive phone or car, you are basically a no name. At the same time, we are not using that phone properly, or we are using it badly. So, our relationship with technology is very strange.

We do not know, or most Romanians do not know the difference between Facebook and the Internet. No, for real. I mean, there are people who could not tell the difference between Google and the Internet.

The biggest scandal possible was about this "Microsoft file", where some things happened and it is worth researching, especially in the context of your study, because now Microsoft is back on the market and has other strategies. You would go to a public institution and see that they have Windows, but it has an expired license. And it is most probably a Windows XP from 20 years ago. Because nobody was buying licenses centrally for Microsoft anymore.

So yes, a complete laxity from this point of view and that is why an effort will not be understood from my perspective, maybe only when I see it happening. But now it is something that, culturally speaking, is more directed at the educated young urban population.

We have a deeply uneducated population, not just digitally, but in general, who still use WhatsApp. There is no more text messaging via phone, I do not think people send each other texts anymore, they either communicate via WhatsApp or Messenger.

Interviewer:

Okay, but you are referring to a cultural factor at population level, but if you were to refer to institutions...

Respondent:

That is where the issue stems from. This is also transmitted into institutions, that is what I meant. This culture also has access to institutions because you may be given the smartest laptop in the world. It is nice, but if you do not know how to use it, it is in vain.

You can have a deeply digitalised society or government, a Governmental Cloud, you can everything digital and fast, and whatever you want, but... In addition to all this effort, you will also have a huge effort in training for civil servants. Nobody is talking about that, but that would have a profound impact, because the relationship with the citizen will change instantly. And by the way, if I were you, I would be interested in what is the stage of the initiative, in fact, the law signed by the President, which says that in relation to the authorities you should no longer come up with data they already have about you. I do not know exactly the number or title of that law. But I know that implementation rules for it had to come out. However, if I go now to City Hall and ask for a copy of something and just show my ID, they will laugh at me.

Interviewer:

I noted that down. Thank you! If I were to go back a little bit to all the pressures we talked about earlier, internal, external, conditional, unconditional, do you think that maybe the external conditions or the fact that we have new models of best practices will change or, maybe, have already changed a little bit these cultural features of the administration?

Respondent:

Yes, I think we have on the one hand, good inter-institutional collaboration. But it happens with institutions outside the country rather than with those in our country. I think things have been learned, but in general one cannot achieve much without having a political decision-maker or decision-maker in general who says, "Look, we saw this good thing there, so we have to do it".

And I will give you another very good, I mean, bad example. Tarom. Otopeni Airport. Not to mention Constanta port. You do not have a centralised, computerised system there. In general, you must have a political decision-maker or an administrative decision-maker who says: "From tomorrow on, this is what happens". In general, a Romanian administrative cultural custom is portrayed by this resignation that: "Yes, what others do looks great, but it will never be possible to have that in Romania".

Interviewer:

- Respondent:** And why do you think we lack such a political decision-maker?
- Respondent:** I think it is a complex combination of needs, lack of critical thinking and lack of civic education, more precisely lack of involvement. Not to go into religion, but we are missing that Protestant work ethic in which an individual works in the institution in which he identifies with, and therefore tries to improve himself and the institution over time. There is no such thing within our administration. But how nice that we will have new computers!
- Interviewer:** Before I get to the final question, if you were to balance the technical pressures, represented by the conditions of the market or institutional efficiencies against the institutional pressures, where we talk about an informed inspired by the trends and values imported from wider contexts, where would you tip the scales?
- Respondent:** No, no, no. It was all about the money. I mean, it was about the fact that there was money dedicated to that. Romania alone would have done nothing.
- Interviewer:** But I am strictly talking about the reconfiguration of digital capacities.
- Respondent:** I think it was always desired somehow. Things have evolved, I cannot say they have not. Now, for instance, fewer documents are needed. Evolution would have happened anyways, but much slower. We now have potential, but that is mainly through Sebastian Burduja's efforts and through what happened a little earlier. We might have a slightly more modern society already by 2030. Indeed, political will, funds – which we did not have before, and an internal reference of "C'mon! It cannot be like that anymore, because we will not get voted any longer. We must modernise the state because people will not vote for us anymore". People are leaving the country, our retirement system is failing, we have some profound systemic challenges that have become even more obvious following the pandemic. Therefore, I strongly believe that the authorities had to move and do something, because otherwise they would have lost the country.
- Interviewer:** We came to the last question. How do you think ADR and MRID have contributed or currently contribute to increasing the legitimacy or credibility of the Government in everything related to promoting digital transformation?
- Respondent:** I think it depends a lot on who is the Minister. From this point of view, Sebastian Burduja's departure was not a good idea. He was the face of digitalisation. One major deficiency was the mess of "Ion", and well, that is also a very good question: where is Ion now?
- Interviewer:** Indeed. I forgot about "Ion"!
- Respondent:** Yes, well, look... I think your question makes more sense from a political point of view. The party that will bring digitalisation to Romania at a certain point will gain a little more than the others. At the same time, we must think that digitalisation means not only the digitalisation of things and institutions, but also the profound transformation of the way we think, work, and so on. That would also mean electoral reform. And online voting is far away...
- Interviewer:** I understand. Well, I came to the end with my questions. If you want to add something else before you stop recording.
- Respondent:** No, nothing more. Thank you for inviting me! I think the discussion and your topic are very interesting and I wish you good luck with your thesis!
- Interviewer:** Thank you for your time and openness! I am going to stop recording now.

Interview No. 5 – CODE: P5
Documented on 03/07/2023, 5:30 PM
Duration: 60 minutes

Interviewer:

Thank you for agreeing to record this meeting. First, I wanted to thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in this interview.

I would like to start, perhaps, with a brief introduction. My name is Paula Pruneci, and I am currently an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master student in Public Sector Innovation and eGovernance. I studied in Belgium, Germany, and Estonia and now I have returned, for good I hope, to native lands, so to say.

As I previously highlighted in the invitation I sent you, I aim to discover potential factors that led to the reconfiguration of the attributions regarding digitalisation within the Government and the creation, or rather, the reorganisation of the former institutions dealing with digitalisation in what we know today as ADR and, respectively, MRID.

I would now like to give you the floor and kindly ask you to introduce yourself and to describe what is your connection, let us say, with the digitalisation realm within the public sector, or with the public sector in general.

Respondent:

My name is [...]. I worked for [...] years or so in the central public administration, within the Victoria Palace. To put it briefly, I had to deal with a lot of public policies and a lot of data. However, I have witnessed several emblematic situations in which people wanted to innovate. I can talk about them if necessary. But let me know, is there a certain structure you need to follow? How should we proceed about it?

Interviewer:

This interview is semi-structured, so since you have already mentioned those emblematic situations, I would like to start with them.

Respondent:

Well, they are more complex. For example, at one point I know that someone wanted to develop an IT application with regard to monitoring the situation of technical education in Romania, but there was reluctance coming from several Ministries – especially from the Ministry of Education – when it came to implementing this project. They had the argument that there were already similar projects. Needless to say, the projects were not similar.

There was a very nice question in your invitation: the one regarding how digitalisation happened, in which you were wondering whether it originated from within the system or rather appeared because of external pressure. In my opinion, the answer relates to the external pressure. There were several situations where there was a clear need for improvement, and an improvement was accessible, but the people in the system were extremely opaque and made an enormous push-back so that they did not have to implement anything. Basically, the system's resistance to change was enormous. Then, just as now, all the administration's effort goes towards fire-fighting and day-to-day problems. The daily processes and unexpected occurrences occupy 100% of the time of public administration. They do not have time for ideas, they do not feel like improving anything, they simply do not see the point of this stuff. They do not accept new ideas, even if that would mean improving citizens' lives.

Let me give you some examples: the idea of digitalising the issuance of criminal records. At the time, I know someone did an analysis and there were about 2.4 million criminal records. Citizens had to go to the post office, make the payment, then go to the police, and so on. The idea of a virtual private space was then implemented, or at least it was under discussion, and there was also a discussion about associating an email with a person, with a personal identification numerical code. People, and I am speaking here of the leader of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, vehemently showed resistance to this idea, by finding a hundred problems for which this cannot be done. Everything had to be kept exactly as it was in physical format, because apparently, for them at least, things worked like that too. But looking back on that, if we presume that it takes an hour for each of those 2.4. millions of criminal records, that change would have saved a lot of time. The administration did not care.

On the one hand, they do not have the capacity to allocate people and they cannot allocate people for projects. On the other hand, there always find an already-existing study to

show them the needs for certain areas. However, they do not take into account the quality of those studies, or the differences between the studies they show and the proposed project ideas. They do not listen. They simply refuse novelty.

In fact, they show reluctance to certain projects when there are similar ones that benefit from European funding. This happens because those institutions can eventually round up the salaries of people in public administration using those funds. They think that is the way in which everybody wins: the EU gives them the money and they implement these projects; people win because they work there, and they get their salaries rounded up. It was perfect for everyone. We have not seen the result of those implemented projects. And they were implemented using many million euros from the EU.

Besides that, during my stay, I always tried to gather information. People in the administration do not do data-driven policies. But they have to do that! They need to have some evidence on which to rely on when making public policy. First, who are you targeting, who are those people, what characterises them? Second, how did you choose this solution? You need to come up with a complete apparatus of evidence to show who is your target, what is the impact on them and what is the impact on the budget. These things are not done.

Interviewer:

You reached an area I also wanted to tackle. I took some notes and I have noticed that you first talked about this resistance to change, and you also mentioned the fact that the Government does not measure. Why do you think we have this culture of not measuring indicators? And why do you think we are resistant to change?

Respondent:

Chaos is beneficial to those who have information. If all things were organised and open, you would become replaceable. Conversely, if you have a chaos in which only you know the organisation of stuff, you will be irreplaceable. If you have impeccable management, with very well-done information organisation, you can be changed at any time. Basically, it is a controlled chaos system.

And I will tell you one more thing: people were gathering the data, but they did not admit they had it. Whenever a request came, boom, the data would appear. That is one thing I admired about the Romanian administration: those people who gathered the indicators and worked with them were extraordinarily thorough to cover as many cases as possible. I am sure of that.

These people try to put as much “weight” as possible on data collection in order to have as much data as possible. How they use the data afterwards is not within the scope of this discussion. I am just saying that they were trying to gather as much information as possible, because information is power. Information gives them power; power then makes them infallible. When someone becomes a minister or director in one institutional body, one realises that he/she is not the boss there, but the slave of all the people who cannot be replaced.

I am interested in conveying these things as well as possible and I am glad that there is someone who tackles this topic within a paper. It must be known that the public environment is toxic. It is a sick system that suffers from many diseases. There is no guaranteed solution. It is a long process, and you have to change the people placed there. It is a struggle for power and supremacy that controls everything that means the public machinery. Good, professional people, who do not have the nerve to bother with this, give up and leave.

Interviewer:

If we were to return to the reasons mentioned in the beginning of our discussion, do you think that these can modify in the future all these cultural-administrative features of the public administration in Romania?

Respondent:

No, definitely not. The behaviour will be the same. Everyone will try to work as hard as possible in order to be as comfortable as possible at work. You have very few idealistic people. I indeed met some exceptional people. There were two programmes in the Romanian public administration that are not very known, incredibly well done, yet poorly implemented. The Special Scholarship of the Romanian Government [SSRG – “*Bursa Specială “Guvernul României”*”], do you know it?

Interviewer:

Let me check. Yes, I know it.

Respondent:

Not so many people know it. It was about students trained at the most renowned universities in the world and returned to Romania as to revolutionise the Romanian public administration. They were basically eaten alive. Those people took out loans to pay off their debt to the Romanian state and quickly resign from their public administration jobs. They spent a lot of money on psychologists because they were going crazy. This was the impact, out of 500 people there are about 100 left in the public administration. There were two programs, SSRG [“BSGR”] and Young Professionals Scheme [YPS].

Interviewer:

So, what happens to the good people who stayed in the system?

Respondent:

They get tired after a year or, maybe, after two years. When one works in the private sector, the project one is working on materialises, because if it does not materialise, the company goes bankrupt. In the Romanian public administration, if you have 1/5 of the projects that come to an end, then you are indeed successful, so to say.

Interviewer:

Why is this happening?

Respondent:

Well, let us go back to why things will not change. Everyone agrees with some ideas, but you must convince each Ministry to sign the documents. This could hardly be done. Sometimes it took us months to negotiate with the Ministries to sign something, even though everyone agreed it was necessary.

Interviewer:

OK, so you would rank it as an organisational culture issue.

Respondent:

Yes, it is an avoidance of responsibility. The very good people I mentioned are still there, and they are the only ones who make the system work. Without them, the system would collapse. But they do not want to do it anymore. They are tired of their ideas being stolen by others. And this is how it is always portrayed in the press.

Interviewer:

I see. This was a recurring topic in other interviews, about things done by some, and then others who took undue credit for those specific instances.

Respondent:

Yes, those are the reasons why good people do not want to stay in the public administration anymore. Their projects do not come to fruition, and they basically work in vain; or their projects are assumed by others and others take credit for it. Or they literally do not have time to do them. And there are the people who entered the public administration with the thought of doing good for this country. I have known exceptional people who have been confused and disappointed by what is happening and about to give in. These people are not supported to do something.

It is a fatal combination: insufficient payment – you cannot give an IT specialist 3500 RON – plus the toxic environment – you have a lot of nepotism. It is also about the fact that there are enough people for the things that need to be done: maybe you have an enormous mandate, a list comprising of many activities, but you only have 5 people. Which ones do you prioritise? Well, you need to prioritise the necessary ones, otherwise the state basically dies.

To a certain extent, I also understand them. The whole digitalisation process must be kept from above. All examples of digitalisation came with enforcement from above. Look, an exceptional thing was the publication of company data. Currently, if you want to see the financial data of companies, you do not have to go to the Trade Register. On the data.gov.ro website you have all these data published every year by the Ministry of Finance. This happened because someone really wanted it done, and they had to fight the Trade Register, which was totally opposed, because it was their source of funding.

Interviewer:

Speaking of funding sources, I was wondering whether you think that maybe EU funding is also part of this pressure? Did EU funding make things move?

Respondent:

Yes, if we did not receive EU funding for the Digital Agenda, people would not have had that data. And we are talking about big data. If there were not people hired there to clean up the databases and make them readily available, we would not have that information.

So yes, it mattered. But there have also been examples when that EU money has been misused.

Data should be put into platforms that can be used by anyone who comes later, whether they are Prime Minister, Secretary of State or civil servants. The people that follow others need to be able to go in there and see the existing indicators and, depending on that, formulate better public policies for this country.

Also, sometimes you cannot find out what kind of projects are being implemented or who is implementing them, these are generalised secrets that cover money being chopped for nothing, and people do not want to talk about it. We are talking about millions of euros.

Interviewer:

The last question is somehow connected to everything we have talked about so far. Do you think that all this restructuring of bodies on digitalisation wanted to contribute to increasing the legitimacy and credibility of the government in promoting digital transformation?

Respondent:

Yes, but the major problem is that people try to have multiple targets for their digitalisation approach, not just one entity. And when they get there, it is done. If you do not have supra-ministerial coordination to actually push things forward, things will not happen. If you do not have a team from the General Secretariat of the Government, so from the government headquarters or from the Prime Minister's Chancellery, things will not happen. Now, I think that, by giving such an important role to this digitalisation, people understand that it is super important to do that. In fact, they realise that they have an equal partner to sign their documents when they need it. Because to be frank, the administration follows the law of the jungle: "I only sign that for you if you sign this for me".

Interviewer:

I understand, so is it the law of compensation?

Respondent:

Yes, and there was also animosity between Ministries. You had to get over personal egos and you had to get people to collaborate. Without outside intervention, digitalisation would not have been allowed to take place. The institutions would not have given access to the data. And digitalisation without data and without access to information is impossible. If you have a ministry that has a fixed digitalisation agenda, things are different. To a certain extent, I can say that without a proven, visible intention on behalf of the Prime Minister in this direction, things would not happen. And the Prime Minister's direct behaviour will never happen in a country like Romania, that spends 90% of its time on firefighting, instead of strategy, improvements, forecasting and predictions.

Interviewer:

OK. I came to the end with my questions. If there is anything else you would like to share at the end of the interview...

Respondent:

These were the cases I thought about. I have nothing more to add.

Interviewer:

Okay, I will stop recording.

Interview No. 6 – CODE: P6
Documented on 03/07/2023, 8 PM
Duration: 40 minutes

Interviewer:

Good, the recording has started. First, I wanted to thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in this interview.

I would like to start with a brief introduction of myself. My name is Paula, and I am currently an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master student in Public Sector Innovation and eGovernance. I therefore studied in Belgium, Germany, and Estonia and now I have returned to Romania.

As I previously highlighted in the invitation I sent you, I aim to discover potential factors that led to the reconfiguration of the attributions regarding digitalisation within the Government and the creation, or rather, the reorganisation of the former institutions

dealing with digitalisation in what we know today as Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania and, respectively, the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation. I would now like to give you the floor and kindly ask you to introduce yourself and to describe what is your connection with the digitalisation realm within the public sector.

Respondent:

My name is [...]. I am at the [...] mandate in the Romanian Parliament. In my [...] term I was [...] of the IT&C committee of the Chamber of Deputies. I can say with all modesty that, at that moment, I think I was pretty much the only one seriously dealing with IT policies in the committee because there is a lot of disinterests and, back then, there was no new generation of colleagues concerned about this topic. I could say that 100% of any initiatives around digitalisation policies were passing through me. Additionally, I could also say that, in Romania, we have legislated institutions from scratch, one of them being ADR. Even if, at the initiative level, it was the government, at the policy level it was an application of the policies of that government. As I took part in writing the government programme, I was somewhat obliged to implement it.

Interview:

I am glad we got here, because I really wanted to start with some questions that would place us in the context of the research topic. I wanted to know what you think were the objectives of all the institutional rearrangements regarding digitalisation.

Respondent:

Paula, you are going way too far. Romania is very simple. The government programme has been written on a simple structure. We wanted to write an easy-to-understand government programme. We started from a fairly simple phrase, namely that the private sector and the expertise from the private sector must be at the centre of the public policies pushed by the PNL [*National Liberal Party*] government. And the idea was that everything that means expertise from the private sector should be put at the centre of public policies in Romania, as the government individually would have been unable to create correct and healthy policies for the digitalisation area. Yes? Also, you know our results in the DESI indexes. I do not need to come up with those arguments...

Regardless of my opinion, there were 2-3 other people – not from the government area... There was a consultation with institutions, including people from the public policy area. I said that if this minority government was in power, we must work together for these policies. Things changed radically because [...] became Prime Minister, who did not really understand digitalisation affairs. But, above all, he was an honest Prime Minister with the idea to get rid of the Ministry of Communications and Infrastructure. He wanted to create an agency, based on a European model. It was an impulsive matter.

It was an internal policy issue; it was not external. There have not been many arguments put forward, such as “to be more efficient”. Frankly, the authority was populated with incapacities afterwards anyway. This has been achieved on the premise of changing a heavy ministry and contoured by the idea of having a “supple” government. And I said, “OK, but it is not justified to give up a ministry. Communications and digitalisation are matters of the future”.

The Prime Minister’s decision came with both good and bad consequences. First, we lost about 6 months, because back then, in the digitalisation area, councillors were very weak. I say this by taking full accountability: they were practically incapable of making public policies, they had no expertise, they were party people. I personally opposed to this; I did not want councillors to be party people. However, I, among my colleagues, managed to convince people that the Ministry should not be an Agency, and that it should at least become an Authority, precisely because we wanted to give it some kind of power.

Like this, it would have functioned as a kind of cross-sectoral authority of digitalisation across ministries. The idea was simple, Sabin Sarmaş was brought in as a director. He was someone who really understood the issues and challenges of digitalisation, someone with whom we worked very well, who comprehended the intricacies of the field very well. Sabin understood the opportunity to hire 20-30 paid experts who would be independent, who could come up with some real digital expertise for the ministries, while also being covered by the central power of the Government and who could become some sort of sheriffs who would guide the ministries with regard to what they had to do.

It took approximately 6 months to map all the ministries; to see how Romania looks – digitally – within the current ministries. That was pretty much the basic idea. Obviously, the discussion has come about who is taking control over the Authority. Everyone wanted

to be the boss. The decision was to put ADR under the Prime Minister, precisely to give the authority some power. Since we have removed and abolished the ministry, we put this institution under the Prime Minister.

Because the ministry was disbanded, a lot of attributions, a lot of components of the ministry, such as cyber security, the NIS directive, and many other components migrated. For example, part of the Ministry of Infrastructure went to the Ministry of Transport – more specifically, the legal part and the human resource part. It was an extremely difficult process of approximately 6-8 months, which implied this transition in which a lot of things were lost, unfortunately.

The institution started to catch momentum, because during the pandemic it did relatively good things, as it contributed to some emergency management situations. In principle, the idea was to give this institution a badge and power from the Prime Minister. Here is, in fact, the key factor or the supreme discussion on digitalisation in Romania. If the Prime Minister does not politically give a force to a digitalisation project, any Minister or Head of Agency has zero chance to do anything, because they instantly come into direct conflict with the Ministry of Finance, which has their own cloud, their own ego, or with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which also have their own components. Nobody wants to share data.

After all, we are talking about Romanian institutions. You have STS, which thinks of itself as a supreme integrator, as if it were the only player on the digital market, as if there is no private environment. This is extremely unhealthy for Romania. However, they also do some good projects, and I cannot argue with that.

Therefore, ADR has been a kind of referee between these institutions and these Ministries because the lack of power or lack of accountability for political decisions have always been constant. That is how the discussion with the DNSC [*National Cyber Security Directorate*] came about, which is another institution we dealt with. When we heard the idea in the intelligence area, and I say this openly, we thought that we would also need a civilian cyber component on the private area. We thought about making a cyber joint-command in which to work with the private environment. We liked the idea a lot, so we took CERT-RO [*Romanian National Computer Emergency Readiness Team*] and turned it into DNSC. Politically, I openly supported this option. This was a much harder and more complex process than the ADR one, due to egos of some ministries who did not want to give the approvals. There is sabotage and discussion in the administrative realm, and you must migrate between these entities and find consensus. However, the DNSC was taken seriously, because after the phones of several deputies and senators began to be hacked, the world began to understand the cyber danger.

I drew this parallel with the ADR because since then, the ADR has become some kind of political stake. So, basically, you have MRID, which has a Minister. And ADR, which is inside MRID now.

Interviewer:

This was actually part of my next question. Why did you decide to take ADR from the centre of the Government and place it under the ministry?

Respondent:

Well, the discussion was the same again. We came to another government, because this is Romania. Discussions began that the ADR has a director from PSD [*Social Democratic Party*], yet the Minister is from PNL [*National Liberal Party*]. The Prime Minister is from PNL. That is, they went with the idea of concentrating digitalisation again in one place while not abolishing ADR, because huge efforts were made to create it anyway. When a ministry dealing with digitalisation was re-established, all the construction went under the ministry naturally. Many would have liked to remain independent under the Prime Minister. Because if the Prime Minister does not print a technical direction on digitalisation, and this has not happened, at least a competent minister will be able to have some control over ADR. At the moment, yes, it is a highly tangled thing within the ministry, which has an Authority that should have pound on the governmental table, so to say, and dictate the strategy, policies, agendas and explain how we should align with European directives.

Sebastian Burduja has been relatively a good minister, at least concerning the image of the institutions. Also, I can say that in the projects area he has performed honourably, compared to others. Things have started moving, changes can be observed. I personally am concerned about the way in which I observe the money translated into what is

implemented. In ADR, there are dozens of projects catching up, of tens of millions of euros, which are a few years old and will no longer have an impact. They are only implemented because they have to be paid and operationalised, but they do not follow a concrete strategy of the Authority or of the ministry to achieve some concrete national objectives. For example, the Governmental Cloud was a failed project from the beginning in my opinion. It is a project in which several hundred million are wasted on devices and equipment that will become obsolete anyway when we will reach implementation.

Interviewer:

Why do you think the Governmental Cloud is a failed project?

Respondent:

Because of the ego of some institutions, I gave you an example earlier. It is the reality.

Interviewer:

I wanted to go back a little bit to what you referred to as an “impulsive decision” of the Prime Minister. However, you used the phrase “an agency on a European model”. Were there any EU standards or values that inspired the decision?

Respondent:

No, again, I do not know exactly what the idea was. The Prime Minister at that time was advised by some people. However, we tried to explain that in Romania an agency was not enough, because the agency does not have enough power to implement things, and that is why we made it an authority. By law, the authority has all the leverage to act, and more than that, we proposed to put it directly under the Prime Minister, and the General Secretariat of the Government, precisely to charge it with political power. And I think this is a relatively good model in Romania, when you want to act on a certain topic. If one places them under the PM and delegates someone there, it is a kind of sideGovernment, a kind of outsourcing. Now, it is all about applicability. Decisions can be made by anyone. We created the Authority, but what exactly did we have after this? Ghiseul.ro? I am sorry, but Ghiseul.ro is a private initiative; it was fuelled by the private sector. The guys from Ghiseul.ro asked the ministry to accept them at some point. To quote Ronald Reagan, “The most terrifying words are: “I am from the government, and I am here to help”.

Interviewer:

Because I do not want to keep you too long, since you answered some of my other questions in your answers anyway, I would like to delve into some things you have already mentioned, like the power of politics in all these administrative or institutional games. Do you think there is a particular culture or some defining polity factors regarding institutional reforms in Romania?

Respondent:

Paula, unfortunately there is not. The concrete and true answer is that it does not exist. I witnessed three PM mandates. Fortunately, Romania survived circumstantially. Decisions like this were not made based on a strategy. There was no plan. That is the truth.

And then, people matter a lot. And it is not only about me, but if there were not 2-3 people along me who also had influence over the Prime Minister, we would not have succeeded. The Prime Minister's advisor was not good for the digitalisation sector. I tried to pursue the Prime Minister with the help of several expert opinions. I had to come with people from the private sector or from other institutions outside the administration in order to support my opinion. The GEO [*Governance Emergency Ordinance*] for ADR at one point had 6 articles. I know the GEO's history very well. It was a complete aberration, I insisted on changing the articles. That is the political game, really. It is not necessarily about personal interests or goals. In the absence of a plan and strategy, there are many factors. In the end, who is willing to fight more it is going to win. That is the idea in Romania.

And we should also talk about lack of expertise, lack of involvement and lack of political ownership. You can go to a ministry, an agency, an authority: well, nobody signs you a request, a sheet, an address if they do not get a green light from above. No one takes responsibility for anything.

Also, expectations are very high, given that the level of digital literacy is execrable. We undoubtedly deserve our last place in the DESI indexes. Data shows the reality of the market, in the end. And everyone likes to talk about digitalisation, but in reality, a concrete and correct strategy has not been steered because resources have not even been

allocated. But that is also a risky topic, also these resources could be allocated according to preferences and certain projects are prioritised, some of which are absurd or inefficient. For example, why is there no investment fund in Romania for the field of successful start-ups? Right? I mean the Romanian state could have, I do not know, a few hundred or tens of million euros annually, and identify several domestic companies that, in terms of the technologies, can eventually become unicorns, if accorded the right funding opportunities. They should investigate what financing needs they have and offer them governmental grants because their product is unique on the market. Of course, we invest at the risk of failing. In business, 1 in 10 companies are successful. It is a very simple practice. There is a risk that the company will not be successful. However, research itself is an extra step in that field. And these things should also happen in Romania, given that you have super high quality human resource. But this is all about political ownership. And I want to give you another example and then I am done. Let us take the project "Ion".

Interviewer:

Really, what is going on with "Ion"?

Respondent:

"Ion" reached international level; the project was on the heights of international news. It is a failed project, in my opinion. This is because it has nothing sustainable behind it. Even at the last event I attended, they could not get him to say a simple phrase. But it is not about that. I remember the attitude of the government coming to a hearing in the IT Commission in which they were reprimanded because this "Ion" does not work. The government apologised and said that it is a civic, voluntary initiative in which not a cent of government money has been used. Folks, this is a joke. If we boast in the international press that Romania has the first Prime Minister's AI honorary advisor, people also must allocate resources! They had to politically take responsibility for this decision and allocate a budget. If I really believe that there is a scientific basis behind my project, I allocate money so that I can export it as a model. So that the Financial Times can write multiple articles about me, not just one and then make fun of my initiative. That is pretty much the concept. But in Romania, especially in the area of digitalisation, people do not assume a political decision. And political decision means allocation of funds. That is what we are talking about.

Interviewer:

I get it. Thank you so much for your openness. I came to the end with my questions. If you want to add something else before we finish.

Respondent:

I must add that, despite all this, Romania survived circumstantially. There is, however, a generation of young people in the Parliament, from PSD and PNL and USR [*Save Romania Union political party*], who understand the digital alphabet much better. It was very difficult for me, because I was alone and could not cope with these discussions. I was basically a de facto minister, for real. All decisions that were made in the government came to me. Since I was not a minister, it was frustrating, because I realised that there is really no interest in this area, because there is no education in this area. It is not worth being a minister if you do not have the assurance that the Prime Minister, who is above you politically speaking, gives you freedom and sufficient political power so that you can really implement some policies, release PPPs, not be afraid of contracts, and so on. In our country there is no legal basis, in our country you cannot make a partnership, put a researcher in the ministry to do something, because there is no legal basis. We have this paranoia and fear of responsibility.

But again, there is a new generation that I think will change things.

Interviewer:

I am glad that we end on an optimistic note, and I assure you that this aspect will also be mentioned. Thank you for your time! I am going to stop recording now.

Interview No. 7 – CODE: P7
Documented on 04/07/2023, 11 AM
Duration: 60 minutes

Interviewer:

So, now that the recording is on, I would like to give you the floor and ask you to introduce yourself and tell me what your connection to the public sector is, or to the digitalisation realm within the public sector.

Respondent:

OK, good. So, I arrived in the public sector in the year [...], as a cabinet advisor to a secretary of state from the former Ministry, MCIS [*Ministry of Communications and Information Society*] this was in the first [...] government. For me, it was a black box approach and I had to understand its parameters. At a first glance, the ministry seemed something that could not be understood. I then moved to Victoria Palace. I was a cabinet advisor to a secretary of state for several years. This means that I caught the governments of [...], [...] and [...]. In the [...] government, I was employed in another cabinet, where I stayed until the [...] government came. I also worked in a sector town hall in Bucharest, where I dealt with digitalisation. That was a highly relevant experience for me. At the same time, I am preoccupied with drafting legal norms, and I still follow quite closely what is happening in other areas of digitalisation, including in the Parliament. So, my experience is about 10 years in the governance area, in which I saw both MCIS [*Ministry of Communications and Information Society*] and the Prime Minister's Chancellery, as well as the local administration, and the legislative environment.

Interviewer:

I noted it down, thank you. Because you have such a vast experience, I would like to start maybe with some questions that will place us in the context of the topic. The first question is very broad, but I think you could summarise the answer to this question, given your broad experience. Why all these changes?

Respondent:

It is a very complicated answer because there are several axes on which the strength of the impact or influence, and even the nature of the actors, are measured. First, it must be understood that on a human level, people are divided into people who want to change things and people who treat everything as a job in which they have a personal interest. Personal interest can be understood both from the perspective of having a protocolary position and the ability to control certain things, especially budgets. The ratio of these people is not equal. Generally, those who want to change something and improve the current situation are represented by 10-15% of the staff generally. So, many things did not happen because people in the majority category tried to arrogate certain rights to themselves, without understanding that there are also certain obligations to be satisfied. This brings me to the second axis, namely the performance that each form of institutional organisation has delivered, and the fact that, from the beginning, this performance was impaired by a misunderstanding of the mission. The role of the IT department in any organisation is to support the general objectives of the organisation, which can be achieved through digitalisation or any other methods. People, on the other hand, wanted to digitalise only for the sake of digitalisation, which is a current buzzword. This has historically led to conflict with other government departments and so-called line ministries that have to do practical things.

So, what did not work from the beginning, respectively since 2003, when MCIS was founded, was this approach of theirs, which does not come from an adherence to a doctrinal current. Their approaches have always been divergent. They approached this doctrine of coming and digitalising not because they were followers of this doctrine of digitalisation, but because they believed they had the right to come and bring order to other public institutions. They pushed this through some legal provisions that they kept pushing forward and which were one-page, superficial laws that did not address the essentials. They went and said, "We have something not very concrete, we have the money, the European money, and therefore you have to say what we tell you to say and do as we order". This worked for partners – ministries – smaller than them, but not at all for partners, especially not for those which were more important than them. When I say "them", I am referring to this Ministry of Communications and Information Society. If you want to incorporate it in your study, look at the Order of Protocol Precedence, which says ministers are not all equal. Look when they take the oath, what is their order, who is first, who is last. By taking that as a reference, the conclusion is that the Minister of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation can play this game with those who are after him, but that is it. The problem is that, historically, he has always been second or third before the end.

To return to your question, this is the reason why digitalisation has not worked for 10 years, and why we, who are the minority that want things to happen, have lobbied for digitalisation to move into the political responsibility of the Prime Minister. Because we know for sure that the Prime Minister is the first in that line and everyone who is after him must pay attention to what is happening. That is a theoretical approach to why one minister cannot address the order within another minister's sector.

And there is another argument: look at the Secretaries of State who have been appointed, generally about two in the Ministry. One for the Communications area and one for the Information Society area. The Communications area means the area that implies the coordination of the Romanian Post and other such services, so there is a fruitful budget there, plus the relations with the telecom industry, which is also a juicy thing. You will notice that the secretary of state which has the same political colour as the Minister has always been appointed to the money area, which suggests that within the ministry there has always been an emphasis not on digitalisation and digital transformation, but on how we do some things with the Romanian Post, telecom and so on.

People in the governmental environment are not really blind, they notice things like this and there are some absolutely historical events where there were some fractures which proved that for 10 years this system did not work. Therefore, it has been said for a very long time that the Prime Minister should take up this [*digitalisation sector*]. Obviously, the Prime Minister, within his apparatus, could not handle such a heavy and broad domain, and then a technical body was needed. The idea was to set up ADR [*Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania*] as an entity that would support the PM in decision-making and have as little political character as possible. The point was for it to be made up of technical people, without a political career. This would have implied that all the political merits but also all the political "muscle" that is necessary to set things in motion should be assumed by the PM.

The whole thing seemed to be going very well, but then another Prime Minister came, who had absolutely nothing to do with digitalisation. Therefore, the fact that the establishment of ADR was corroborated with some manoeuvres of the people from the former MCIS who moved to ADR, made ADR not prove what there was to prove. So, if the Ministry of Family was established for absolutely nothing, why not also establish the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation [MRID], which nevertheless has a tradition, given all these previous reorganisations? They gave a job to some people; they solved some things. Obviously, they also had to increase the number of state employees, because when MRID was established, there was no migration from ADR to MRID. The former people from MCIS are also in ADR. MRID does not have people specialised in digitalisation, it has only the communication people from the former Ministry of Transport.

I think it is necessary to return to the former arrangement. What do you want us to detail from this whole story?

Interviewer:

I wanted to ask you whether you think that there were also some wider trends' influence, for instance EU values or norms with regard to streamlining digitalisation which played a role in all these institutional reorganisations?

Respondent:

Apart from the fact that the EU is constantly not happy with how we solve the digitalisation issues, no, not to my knowledge. There was no other suggestion at EU level, except around strengthening the role of Governmental CIO. The Governmental CIO was supported by the EU, and I consider this as a pretty clear message that it would be good for things to be concentrated at the level of the Victoria Palace [*at the centre of the Government*] and that it does not work at the level of the ministry. But I do not think there were any legal arguments that the former MCIS should be abolished, or to take a framework from somewhere else, or stuff like that.

Interviewer:

So, these initiatives were not inspired by other successful initiatives in other EU countries? Did it not matter that there were some examples of good practice at EU level?

Respondent:

Things were simple. For these reorganisations to happen, there were some people pulling a rope. Some pulled the rope to the right, some to the left. When it comes to me, I wanted things to happen in the direction of centralising digitalisation at government level.

Also, Estonians came to us under this buzzword, various dignitaries came, meetings have been organised by the Embassy with various companies and so on. The Estonian system is a system that works, but I am not a fan of it.

Interviewer:

Then let us go back to autochthonous lands and talk about cultural factors. Do you think there is a culture or some defining factors of central administration or reforms in Romania?

Respondent:

Are we talking about the organisational culture? If so, the organisational culture of an entity is mainly composed of the history of positions, decisions, and attitudes over time towards certain topics. Culture is something one is being born with, not imposed, although some people may think otherwise. So, if that is the context, please rephrase the question so I can give you a more niche answer.

Interviewer:

I am referring strictly to the organisational-administrative culture indeed. Were there any specific elements in terms of attitudes, communication style, structures, and so on?

Respondent:

In the area of digitalisation in the central Government?

Interviewer:

Exactly.

Respondent:

OK. Well, it must be said that digitalisation in the area of central government has several actors, and each has its own culture. And they do not resemble each other. So, everyone has a different speech and a different approach. Which one are you interested in?

Interviewer:

Let us talk about ADR and MRID. And I also have a new question in relation to what you just said. Is it a problem that organisational cultures differ so much between these institutions, which are, after all, under the same umbrella?

Interviewer:

Absolutely, because the perception of those who sit down at the table of decisions is that they have different goals. It is all an adverse negotiation. It is this "laissez-faire" of each individual so they can all leave each other to reach their own interests. The difference in results is therefore very large between approaches.

And to return to the question, MRID has no culture whatsoever. It does not have specialised people in its own body and everything that happened during Burduja's mandate happened through cabinet people and only 5-6 other people from the taskforce who wanted to work. I would not say MRID has a culture.

The ADR has a culture, as the ADR has taken over the MCIS culture. Because ARDA [*Agency for Romania's Digital Agenda*], the agency that existed in parallel with MCIS, was a small entity. The MCIS was a tree in the shade of which nothing grew. This was a specificity of the former ministry, and could therefore also be valid for ADR, it is also valid for the former CERT-RO [*Romanian National Computer Emergency Readiness Team*]. I have seen this with my own eyes. They would treat them like: "Hey, who do you think you are? We will take care of you so that you understand who is the boss". Even when it came to simple things or requests. There was no aggressive attitude in the CERT [*Romanian National Computer Emergency Readiness Team*] area because there was a Steering Committee in which several institutions were comprised, and the ministry was a coordinator.

So, this was a feature of MCIS that has now disappeared because some of the people left, as they thought it was below their level to go to ADR, and others would still do it, but they have no one to torment anymore, they no longer have anyone under their control.

Another cultural characteristic of MCIS was its affinity for certain companies. Here I am referring to the issuers of qualified certificates. And something that is developing and is more and more visible: there is this scheme that started when Romtelecom was in majority state-owned, in which Romtelecom bid on public projects and contracted where it was supposed to contract. It was used as a kind of screen. And this thing was done with the blessing of MCIS, who followed the principle that nobody will say anything to Romtelecom. In fact, it was the other way around, I assume, but I cannot know for sure, that the sub-contractors proposed this scheme that has been slightly developed today with the Big 4 [consultancy firms]. There are a lot of consulting contracts from Big 4

nowadays. However, Big 4 does not have the necessary specialists to do this consulting and things are quite visible. But that is the new way to do business with the public environment, and we could say it is part of the organisational culture, since this was the question.

Another serious problem that has remained constant is a lack of estimation of one's own capabilities. ADR or the MRID will never say no when it comes to receiving a new role or attribute. They are absolutely excited to have a new role or to contract a new technical contract, and in the end, they realise that they cannot fulfil that role. The most obvious example is ROeID, which requires human verification of those who sign up and at this moment there does not exist a right number of specialised people in the ADR – as the law requires them to be specialised – to do this. They made the project exactly based on these premises, that they will not be able to complete it.

This stuff is obvious when you look at the fact that the most successful project that politicians boast about, namely ghiseul.ro, was developed with private management. So, things are pretty clear.

Interviewer:

Another question, since we talked about past projects, what do you think happened to "Ion"?

Respondent:

Ion was a PR campaign, there is nothing serious about that whole story.

Interviewer:

You said something very, very interesting, namely that “culture is something one is being born with, not something that is imposed”. Starting from this, I wanted to ask you, especially since you mentioned that MRID does not have a culture, do you think that influences from EU can alter the cultural elements mentioned by you?

Respondent:

Well, culture is 99% stored in people. To answer your question, the most effective means through which this could happen would be to change the people. The EU has put certain aspects of digitalisation constantly into their country reports and the only success it had has been with the advent of NRRP.

I forgot to tell you, MRID was founded in early 2020 and the Governmental Decision for it was published on April 1. So, it took three months for that to be released.

Coming back, we took care of resuming discussions with public institutions on rewriting NRRP, because the first NRRP written by the [...] government had nothing to do with anything. This means that we have had discussions and other meetings with the European Commission. NRRP was not written the way we wanted it to, and people do not understand that. NRRP was written to solve certain problems that have been collected by the EU in their country reports on Romania for so many years and have not yet been solved. The world did not understand this.

When we were making those sheets, we had to study years of observations received from the European Commission, to discuss with public institutions and see what both they and the EU want, to find a common denominator and then build something on it in the direction of the Romanian institutions. But there were limits, and it was quite a difficult “ballet”, so to speak.

We have three actors for cultural change: the opinion of the European Commission, which is, in my opinion, always in the right direction, but too soft; We have the opinion of the factors responsible for digitalisation, who would want to spend as much money as possible and then, if it is possible, it would be better if the project has no result, in order to make another one and spend some more money, cause people forget; And then we have the need for real digitalisation that comes bottom-up through every public institution.

In every institution there are serious problems. There is an enormous need for digitalisation, but that digitalisation must be done in the way that solves the simplest, cheapest, and most reliable need specific to the institution. If you want to change the institution, you do not do it by technical means. You need to go to the law of the operating institution, to the institutional objectives, you then change its KPIs, and after you change the KPIs you go and find out what technical solution you need in order to solve that problem.

So, these three actors are fighting each other, and, in my opinion, the European Commission has the merit of coming up with the money; the public institutions have their

merit because they still manage to do something so this country could still survive. However, it is very difficult for me to understand what the merit of the current approach of the politicians is, especially in the case of those who claim they deal with digitalisation. If we are to go somewhere and change things, we must first go to this area that has no real contribution, unfortunately, nowadays. This has been also portrayed by the fact that when MCIS disappeared, there was no disaster.

Interviewer:

I almost came to the end with my questions. My last question: I wanted to ask you if you believe that all these institutional reorganisations regarding digitalisation wanted to contribute to increasing the legitimacy and credibility of government in promoting digital transformation?

Respondent:

Yes, obviously. We need to move from the thinking that “We need to go from digitalisation because we have money to spend” to “We need administrative reform for institutions to function better in the mission they have and, in the services, they provide to citizens”. The only one who can judge, legally speaking, the performance of a ministry and of a minister is the Prime Minister. No one else, not Parliament, not the President. So, if we want to transform an institution that is at the level of the ministry, the Prime Minister must come and measure performance. There has been a lot of talk in recent years about the evaluation of ministers, which has been good; About 10 years ago, this was not really done.

Obviously, one should do it if correctly, on objective criteria, some KPIs, and it should be up to the Prime Minister that these KPIs would have as many elements as possible related to digitalisation. Also, it would not be desirable to ask a minister how many investments he/she has made in digitalisation. It is desirable to have questions like: "In your registry, how many numbers are assigned to documents in electronic format, and how many numbers to a printed document?" or "How many paper tops do you buy each year?". These kinds of questions, where there is no word related to the digital realm, but which could point to answers which we all assume could be solved by digitalisation. That would be the role of the Prime Minister in this whole story. And after telling the minister the results, he/she should give the minister the option to talk to the Governmental CIO, hold a meeting with the CIO and see exactly what can be done. So that is the vision, that is how we should be moving towards. Let the CIO come, talk to the director of that ministry, then come the IT specialists of that ministry and talk to ADR. Yes? That was the vision we pursued.

Interviewer:

You mentioned that we started evaluating performance or measuring. In previous interviews, it has been brought to my attention that we do not really have this culture of measuring, not only individual performance, but organisational performance. Do you think this lack of a culture of measuring has ultimately led to so many institutional reorganisations?

Respondent:

No, the lack is related to a different thing. The lack is related to the fact that measurements, traditionally in Romania, are not considered to be objective. When someone comes and measures something one has done, the measurement result is somehow mostly politically evaluated: people think you have something against them, or that you want to sabotage them. And it is not just about measurements, it is also about criticism. You cannot write a critique and make arguments, because you will be accused of having something against them, of undermining their authority, and so on. A practical proof for this, because I like to provide justifications: after we hardly obtained the ADR to make measurements with regard to government services, the ADR desperately asked not to carry the measurements anymore, ADR asked not to have to praise or criticise other ministries. We asked for this to happen, we got it, and the ADR leadership just wanted to run away from this aspect. Why? It was a purely political attitude of the leadership, and that was a problem from my point of view.

Only now ADR has someone who, although has a certain political colour, has not yet made any missteps. It is absolutely essential to build an image of ADR as professionals without political stakes. Until that happens, things will not work. Obviously, the Prime Minister must take over all the political part and reach the level where, if the ADR

criticises someone, it is perceived that it is the criticism of the Prime Minister, not of the people in the ADR.

Interviewer:

You mentioned “a purely political attitude”. Given the context of the question, I wondered, is this “purely political attitude” intertwined with a runaway from, or a fear of, responsibility?

Respondent:

We need to catch up a bit. Speaking of responsibility. Those who come through politics are 80% “cannon fodder”, and 20% tricksters, to put it popularly. Those brought in to take legal responsibility for certain things that are thought up by someone else fit into the category of “cannon fodder”. And generally, at the level of the ADR, those appointed could be fit into the “cannon fodder” category. I do not think there are any other reasons to put them there, other than to sign when they have to, and only what they have to. So, the fear of responsibility does not exist, because these people sign what they must sign. What they usually do that could count as running away from responsibility – but I do not know much they realise they do it, and how much is related to a sort of incapacity, but they are not able to really judge the problems they are confronted with. Running an institution of this kind means many things that basically do not raise any of their interests. And the best example, which annoys me to the core, is our attitude within the EU. We have all kinds of contributions to make and positions to take in working groups, in consultations, and so on. Our presence is very weak and people who go there are demotivated by the fact that they return to Bucharest, submit a report, make a proposal, and nobody answers them afterwards. Why? Because these people, the ones at home which are put in a position to solve some problems, are not able to solve the rest of the existing issues.

So yes, from this point of view, they run away from responsibility, but not because they understand what the consequences are and refuse to do it, but because they simply do not understand the issues, they are not interested. The reason they are placed there is not that of solving these pressing issues and that is it. So, if by that you mean running away from responsibility... that is what it is all about.

Interviewer:

Thank you for your clarifications. I have come to the end with my questions. I thank you for your time, for your detailed answers and for sharing these experiences. I am going to stop recording.

Interview No. 8 – CODE: P8
Documented on 04/07/2023, 5 PM
Duration: 46 minutes

Interviewer:

Now that the recording is on, I would like to start with a brief introduction. My name is Paula Pruneci, and I am currently an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master student in Public Sector Innovation and eGovernance. I studied in Belgium, Germany, and Estonia and now I have returned to Romania.

As I previously highlighted in the invitation I sent you, within this interview, I aim to discover potential factors that led to the reconfiguration of the attributions regarding digitalisation within the Government and the reorganisation of the former institutions dealing with digitalisation in what we know today as the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania and, respectively, the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation.

I would now like to kindly ask you to introduce yourself and to describe what is your connection with the digitalisation realm within the public sector, or with the public sector in general.

Respondent:

I have been dealing with the digitalisation of the public sector and the public sector in general since [...]. Since then, I have worked in various institutions connected with the Ministry of [*Research, Innovation and*] Digitalisation and the predecessors of the ministry, or with the ADR and its predecessors. I also worked for a while in the private sector, so I also saw things from the other side of the barricade, so to say. So, I have been following the evolution of these institutions since at least [...] years.

Interviewer:

That is excellent! This means you will be able to offer a broader perspective on these occurrences. Therefore, perhaps it would be better to start with some questions that place us in the context of the research topic. Could you give me a brief overview of Romania's past with digitalisation?

Respondent:

Between 2001-2004, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology started to launch some pilot projects. I think it was then that the importance of introducing IT into public administration was first recognised. Then the basic word was computerisation [*informatisation*]. In the form of pilot projects, the Government tried to show both the population and other institutions what computerisation and use of Information Technology in public administration mean. Most of the projects stopped at the pilot level, although some of them were very good. Thus, they did not continue. Most of the pilot projects "died" after a few months or years.

Since 2005 we have noticed a tendency of the public administration to improve the organisation of these activities, to think somewhat strategically, to plan the steps regarding digitalisation. The first inter-ministerial working groups were made to validate and approve large IT projects, so that there are no overlaps and so that systems could be interconnected and interconnectable. The first drafts of strategies regarding digitalisation have been made. Unfortunately, these strategies have remained either in draft form or, literally on paper, even if we are talking about digitalisation. Thus, the point is that these strategies have not been put into practice, they have not been pursued.

Until 2005-2006, Romania had a joint agency, the State Inspectorate for Communications, which was completed with the IT part and became the State Inspectorate for Communications and Information Technology, which somehow merged today's ADR and ANCOM [*National Authority for Communications Administration and Regulation*]. Since the Romanian state had and still has shares in telecommunications operators, according to the competition rules and the rules of the European Commission, the state could not be both a player and a referee. So, the Government had to leave the regulatory area and so the Communications Regulatory Authority was created. So, the Regulatory Authority was separated and became an independent authority subordinated to the Parliament. Within the Government, the IT part remained subordinated to the Ministry.

After that, the formerly mentioned Inspectorate turned into an Agency, I think the first name of it was the "National Agency for Communications and Information Technology", after which it became the "Agency for Information Society Services". Regardless of the name, it had about the same attributions and it has been always subordinated to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, or as it was later called, the Ministry of Communications and Information Society.

Back then, these agencies did not play a very important role in digitalisation. They had several national systems of government on which they operated. E-auctions [*e-licitatie.ro*] was and still is the most important system. Or we can mention the system of transport permits. Both systems were launched in the era of pilot projects. So there have been several pilot projects that have become successful, some even becoming an EU-wide model on the procurement and auctions' side. So, these agencies offered these systems and dealt partially with the STEMs or the e-commerce part, but they had no attributions either on strategies or on implementing strategies, especially when talking about inter-ministerial affairs.

Then, at some point – and here I think it was an interesting turning point – the decision of abolishing the Ministry of Communications and Information Society has been made. I think this happened somewhere in 2009-2010, if I am not mistaken. The Ministry was disbanded: the communications part of the ministry went to the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure. This move makes sense, because communications is actually an infrastructure, many European countries go along with this configuration too. The IT part, including digitalisation, has become subordinated to the General Secretariat of the Government, so somehow at the top, or at the centre of the Government. I think it was renamed "Agency for Romania's Digital Agenda" then. It was the era of the European Digital Agenda, and the Romanian version of it was the "Digital Agenda for Romania". In order to implement this agenda, which is in fact a strategy for digitalisation, the Authority was also established.

Since 2005-2009, the problem has been raised several times that the Ministry of Communications, being a very small ministry, with relatively little political and administrative power within any government, regardless of who the minister is, does not have the necessary power to push digitalisation measures to larger ministries, where digitalisation has an impact – for instance, to the Ministry of Labour, to the Ministry of Finance, the one of Justice or of Education. These are large ministries, for which a small ministry has no authority. If there was no support from the Prime Minister, projects could not be carried out. And there was no such support at the time. Apart from political statements, concretely, we cannot say that digitalisation has been a priority. It was only a declarative priority, but in fact, it was not seen as a real priority. Thus, maybe that is why the decision of moving the Agency for Digitalisation to the General Secretariat of the Government was taken. To give the institutions some strength. On the other hand, I think political arguments contributed too. In that political context, this was the best solution, and maybe it was not done with a vision towards the importance of digitalisation per se, but this was simply how the Government at that time was structured politically and institutionally.

The proof that digitalisation was not the strongest argument for these changes is that after a few years, the Ministry of Digitalisation was re-established, merged with the Ministry of Research and Innovation, as we have it now, in which came the communications part from the Ministry of Transport merged with the Ministry of Research. The Digitalisation Authority returned to the subordination of MRID, and was renamed as we know it now, ADR. We used to have an agency, which now is an authority, which is quite an important aspect to emphasise.

In my opinion, and by also talking to several people who worked for the Authority back when it was placed under the General Secretariat of the Government and who are now subordinated to the Ministry, I do not think it was a successful move. That is because the majority confirms that, while they were under the General Secretariat of the Government, they had total authority over the other ministries. Now that they are coming from an authority which is placed under the ministry, even though the ministry is now stronger, by having incorporated the Research and Innovation domains, things are not the same. It is still not a very strong ministry. Colleagues from other countries also confirmed that a separate Ministry of Digitalisation or IT does not have the necessary power compared to classical ministries, such as the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Education, and so on.

Mostly, in Europe, within the cases I have studied throughout time, digitalisation is close to the Prime Minister. A digitalisation authority is coordinated best directly by the Prime Minister, or by a Secretary of State directly under the Prime Minister. In our country, at the moment, we do not have this structure. But highly relevant things can be achieved even within the current arrangement.

Interviewer:

Thank you. Since you mentioned that, in other countries, a horizontal topic such as digitalisation is best placed at the centre, under the Prime Minister, I wanted to ask you, if you think that this reform movement was perhaps inspired by other good practices. What were then the objectives targeted by all these restructurings?

Respondent:

When I said that [*digitalisation*] has reached the centre of Government, maybe it also mattered the fact that, apart from the political context and apart from political reasons, people have also started to admit the importance of digitalisation. When things returned to the way they were before, I think it was just a political decision. Including the re-establishment of the Ministry in a coalition context. When you have a coalition ruling the government, you need more portfolios, more ministries. For a coalition, a supple or lean government with only a few ministries does not work. What is needed is a relatively large government. It is clear that if there are multiple fields, one of them would be taken by the domains of IT and digitalisation.

Instead, when moving digitalisation under one Ministry, it can be seen that no plan was made or that the plan was not carried out to the very end, because for a period of time the attributions of the ministry and ADR overlapped. When the former ministry was abolished and ADR was placed at the centre of the Government, then ADR got all the attributions of the former ministry in the field of IT and digitalisation. When they were put back under the Ministry, the attributions remained, but the same attributions have been undertaken by the newly re-established ministry. Thus, the attributions doubled,

including on the side of policies, strategies. Both the ministry and ADR had the same attributions. However, normally, the ministry should be the one in charge of the policy and strategy side, and the ADR should be the one implementing strategies or policies and operating information systems of national importance. At first it was a mix, but maybe starting with last year, the situation started shifting into a clearer state, from my point of view.

Interviewer:

Good. You mentioned that no plan was made, or rather, that the strategies were not carried out to the very end. Do you think there are certain cultural factors of administration when it comes to institutional reforms at the government level? I have previously been told that we do not have a culture of measuring indicators, that we basically do not measure performance, that we do not carry our strategies to the end, as you said. Do you think these are some cultural factors?

Respondent:

I never thought of it that way, I did not look at it from that perspective. But it is possible, because not only the field of digitalisation suffers from this problem. Generally, in any Ministry, each Minister comes up with his proposals, with his changes and even now, when finally, we somehow have a strategy approved at the level of Parliament with which, by and large, all political parties agree – so it should be cross-party, not depend on the outcome of elections, on the Minister, or on the Prime Minister... Even now it seems that things still depend on the Minister and on the Government that is in charge at that time.

The same thing can be seen across all Ministries, so it may be, perhaps, an element of the organisational culture, or maybe the generation that has a different way of thinking has not yet reached leadership, or public administration in general.

Having worked in the field since [...], I noticed that many things are somehow repeated. Even though I took a break at some point and returned after a period back to public administration, I returned to the same problems. The problem in the early 2000s was that of overlapping projects, of duplication of projects, of silos of digitalisation projects that did not interconnect. I can still see the same problem now, after almost 20 years.

In many areas, or sub-domains of digitalisation, you can see the fact that we are slowly advancing, but somehow not progressing. What helps us, however, are European strategies, European directions, also in terms of measurement. Indeed, probably if it were up to us, we would never measure success, performance, or satisfaction of beneficiaries. We would be glad to have launched a system and that is it. Instead, the European Commission, and now, more recently, the OECD will help us pay more attention to this part.

It can also be seen on governmental websites, especially when it comes to electronic services: there are very few electronic services where you can give feedback at the end. Whether you were satisfied or not, there is not much of a survey at the end. In other countries, almost without exception, there is at least one satisfaction question after having used that respective service. Some electronic services in our country also have that, but there are very few. In my opinion, this measurement of citizens' satisfaction should be mandatory. After all, they are the main users of public services and the ultimate beneficiaries of digitalisation.

Interviewer:

I am glad to hear this coming from someone working in the central public administration. I wanted to come back to the fact that you said that European strategies and directions help us to a certain extent, in several ways. Speaking of these European norms, do you think we have any chance that, in future these EU norms and fashions will change the deficient cultural elements you were talking about earlier?

Respondent:

Yes, I think so. I am optimistic. Now we have another opportunity. Apart from EU rules, that are mandatory and that oblige us to have 20 electronic public services or to interconnect different databases with those in the EU – and if we can interconnect with those from the EU, we can also do that at national level – we have another opportunity through NRRP.

Digitalisation has indeed been a more tangible priority in the last 3 years than in previous years, so it is not just declarative anymore. Indeed, it has been seen that emphasis is being placed on it and it can be admitted that this area is supported. Under NRRP, investments

are linked. In the sense that the European Commission grants tranches of aid only if all milestones, all investments related to a payment request are carried out. And then, for instance, we complete a highway in vain if we do not digitalise an institution. That is just an example. We do not receive the money related to that tranche. Therefore, digitalisation is usually hung up on other visible and important infrastructure investments for politicians, such as highways.

It is a huge chance for Romania to really do big digitalisation projects. At least those that are in NRRP; and there are some very important ones there, starting from the Governmental Cloud, the Law of Interoperability, and sectoral digitalisations: in the social, health, finance, education domains, for example. Almost every sector has an important digitalisation project in the NRRP. It came as the suggestion of the European Commission that 20% of the NRRPs should be allocated to digitalisation. Then, Romanian institutions were forced to think about projects in the direction of digitalisation. And if they have been designed, they must be implemented, once again, in order to receive the money for highways as well, so to say.

Interviewer:

OK, so we are not necessarily talking about technical pressure. But we are guided by EU rules and standards on making digitalisation more efficient.

Respondent:

Yes, yes. And especially on the measurement side. Although we are always raking last, and we do not like it. But this could motivate us, first of all, to measure. And it does. I always said that Romania's real rank is not actually on the last or so place. I think that we are, at least on certain criteria, more developed than DESI shows, but we fail to measure or reflect reality in national reporting.

For example, I know that the accessibility of public services is measured, and we have some functioning public services in place, but they have no description. And then, those who check and have a very accurate methodology for verifying public services, they have to grade those services with 0 points. This is because, although those services are being used and are very good, they have no description.

Interviewer:

Why are we not doing anything about it?

Respondent:

We are acting on it, but we just move at a slower pace. And again, there is a lack of authority. If the measures had been taken by the PM or by the General Secretariat of the Government, things would have been much easier to implement. If things come from an institution placed under a ministry, it is harder.

But in the last 2 years there has been a lot of emphasis on this part of DESI, more specifically, on the fact what we have to be more careful about how to measure and report results. There are results, but they must be tracked and reported accurately.

Interviewer:

OK. I noted it down. With this, I want you to know that we reached the last question. I would like to ask you if you think that the reorganisation of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation, with ADR under its authority, somehow aimed at increasing the legitimacy and credibility of the government in all their endeavours of digital transformation? Did the Romanian Government want to show that digitalisation is a real priority through this reorganisation?

Respondent:

At the level of image and political message, yes, we can consider that re-establishing a ministry and naming it as the Ministry of Digitalisation along with creating an Authority – no matter where it is placed – but an Authority for Digitalisation is a strong message that the Government wants to do something in this direction. However, I doubt that from an administrative or organisational point of view the best solution was chosen. From a political point of view and as a political message, on the other hand, they conveyed their message very well, the message that digitalisation is important.

Interviewer:

Okay, thank you for all the information provided. I am grateful for your time, for your willingness to engage in this discussion openly, and for sharing with me your perspectives, experiences, and vision. I am going to stop recording now.

H Codebook Results

Name	Description	Files	References
Cultural Factors	Historical institutional frameworks, customs, norms, values, and internal dynamics of organisations that might affect or steer the reformation processes (Christensen and Læg Reid 2016).	8	186
Public Stakeholders		5	16
Average Age of Public Servants		3	3
Open Mindfulness		2	4
Low Digital Literacy among Public Servants		4	9
Digitalisation as Declarative Priority/Double Talking		5	9
Intra & Inter Institutional Transparency		5	36
Inter-institutional Collaboration		5	14
Inter-institutional Trust		3	8
Intra-institutional Collaboration		3	8
Intra-Institutional Trust		2	3
Trust between Public Stakeholders'		1	3
Lack of Experts within Institutions		7	15
Weak Presence in the EU digital setting		1	1
The Accountability Issue		7	28
Fear of Responsibility		5	13
Avoidance of Criticism		1	2
Lack of Political Ownership		5	11
Resignation		2	2
Prevailing Interests		6	29
Affinity for Certain Private Companies		1	1
Different Cultures between Institutions		2	6
Power over Resource Distribution		6	21
Protocolary Positions of Power		1	1
Reluctance to Change		7	22
Institutional Egos		3	6
Lack of Involvement		2	2
Lack of Objective Measurement		6	16
Lack of Institutional Capacities Estimation		2	2
Data Gathering as Virtue of Irreplaceability		1	4

Environmental Pressure	The ability of a particular institution to conform to and secure the approval of other more powerful entities in its bigger institutional setting (Christensen and Læg Reid 2016; Meyer and Rowan 1977)	8	101
<i>Institutional Pressure</i>	<i>Stemming from various fashions, trends, and myths (Christensen and Læg Reid 2016) imported, in the case of Romania, from higher European Union organisations</i>	6	16
Operationalisation of External Practices		3	5
Strategic National Desires		5	8
Following the Majority		1	3
<i>Technical Pressure</i>	<i>The pressure stemming from technical characteristics or deficiencies, financial or market-related circumstances, and internalised pressures from external forces (Christensen and Læg Reid 2016)</i>	8	85
Competitiveness Levels between the State and the Private Sector		2	3
Compliance with EU		8	38
Fear of Infringement		6	15
NRRP Provisions		7	20
Urging Transparency		5	3
EU Funding-related Pressures		5	14
Institutional Deficiencies		8	23
Silo Development of Digital Initiatives		7	18
Administrative Financial Burden		2	5
Low Scoring in DESI Indexes		4	7

Polity Features	The fundamental political characteristics, ideological movements, electoral system, form of government, and relationships with interested parties in the private sector which may influence a country's ability to take and carry out reforms (Christensen 2003, as cited in Christensen and Læg Reid 2016).	8	68
Internalisation of External Expert Knowledge		4	10
A Culture of Firefighting		3	10
A Tradition of Reform		2	3
Circumstantial Survival of the State		2	4
Impulsive Decision-Making		2	3
Interplays within Administration		8	32
Administration over Citizens		3	6
Politics over Administration		8	26
False Credit over Digital Initiatives		2	5
Incongruence over Digital Priorities over time		7	10
Lack of Clarity in Institutional Roles and Tasks		3	5
Lack of Mission Understanding		3	6
Already-established Relations of Trust		3	3
Negotiation of Power Distributions		7	13
Giving Power to Digitalisation		6	10
Lean or Supple Government vs. Big Government		3	3

I Declaration of Authorship and Consent Form

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this Master Thesis titled “Unfolding the Migration of Digital Capacities within the Romanian Government. An Analysis of the Underlying Rationales for Institutional Reform” is my own work. I confirm that each significant contribution to and quotation in this thesis that originates from the work or works of others is indicated by proper use of citation and references.

Münster, 18 July 2023

Paula-Andra Pruneci

Consent Form

for the use of plagiarism detection software to check my thesis

Name: Pruneci

Given Name: Paula-Andra

Student number: 530671

Course of Study: Public Sector Innovation and eGovernance

Address: Schlossplatz 2, 48149 Münster

Title of the thesis: Unfolding the Migration of Digital Capacities within the Romanian Government. An Analysis of the Underlying Rationales for Institutional Reform.

What is plagiarism? Plagiarism is defined as submitting someone else's work or ideas as your own without a complete indication of the source. It is hereby irrelevant whether the work of others is copied word by word without acknowledgment of the source, text structures (e.g., line of argumentation or outline) are borrowed or texts are translated from a foreign language.

Use of plagiarism detection software. The examination office uses plagiarism software to check each submitted bachelor and master thesis for plagiarism. For that purpose, the thesis is electronically forwarded to a software service provider where the software checks for potential matches between the submitted work and work from other sources. For future comparisons with other theses, your thesis will be permanently stored in a database. Only the School of Business and Economics of the University of Münster is allowed to access your stored thesis. The student agrees that his or her thesis may be stored and reproduced only for the purpose of plagiarism assessment. The first examiner of the thesis will be advised on the outcome of the plagiarism assessment.

Sanctions. Each case of plagiarism constitutes an attempt to deceive in terms of the examination regulations and will lead to the thesis being graded as "failed". This will be communicated to the examination office where your case will be documented. In the event of a serious case of deception the examinee can be generally excluded from any further examination. This can lead to the exmatriculation of the student. Even after completion of the examination procedure and graduation from university, plagiarism can result in a withdrawal of the awarded academic degree.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information in this document. I agree to the outlined procedure for plagiarism assessment and potential sanctioning.

Münster, 18 July 2023

Paula-Andra Pruneci