

ARE SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE THE POLES OF AN EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE AND PROACTIVE ROMANIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION?

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ABSTRACT

The interdisciplinary approach of the term sustainable development has been stated and reaffirmed by many researchers and displayed by many studies. When targeting the public administration sustainability, anyone interested in the topic should have in mind programs, initiatives and actions meant to implement quality policy frameworks and standards, irrespective of the evaluation model. Resilience, as a concept, addresses both the workforce and the organizational level. The method I have used through the undergone analysis is a descriptive one. The Romanian National Plan of Recovery and Resilience has revealed dynamic contexts leading to different organizational behaviours, enablers' motivation and desirable outcomes. The above-mentioned document underlines the term 'reform', implying transformations, solutions and investments. The question that is asked by more and more persons, interested in the domain, is whether sustainable development has gained its momentum, if actions have been implemented so that, through an integrated change process, the long-awaited sustainable development is achieved.

KEYWORDS: *accountability, change, decision maker, governance system, hierarchy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Has *sustainability* the same meaning as *sustainable development*? If a precise definition is searched, the answer cannot be found but in the interdisciplinary aspect of the term which draws from knowledge and inputs within the social sciences and environmental sciences and also from physical sciences and arts. Very many studies underlined the fact of a perceived need to foster integrative approaches and, at the same time, the paucity of literature which addresses matters related to *sustainability* in an integrated way.

Sustainability in the field of public administration is included in:

- the long-run planning;
- the intergenerational equity;
- the reduction of risks taking;
- the conservation of resources; (Leuenberger, 2016)

Sustainable development, on the other hand, is a non-declining capital, a human welfare over time, an environment wherein the system does not cause harm to other systems (Hempel, 2001). It encourages public/private partnerships and community capacity building. *Sustainability* offers a new vision of public administration, a dimension of public administration values, while *sustainable development* works for public administration practice (Leuenberger, 2006). *Sustainable development* brings the concept of *the ecology* of public administration, the idea of interdependence of human life, equilibrium, organic systems, and stabilization (Stillman, 2000).

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Different studies have displayed the image of the *three pillars* of public administration: *efficiency, effectiveness, and social equity* (Svara, & Brunet, 2004). Should *sustainability* be added as a fourth pillar of public administration? This is the question Bartle asks in his article when comparing *sustainability* with *sustainable development*. Bartle as well as other researchers analysed the government's role in practising *sustainability* and *sustainable development*. They are seen and should be understood through their key role in achieving the development goals and targets through, setting and implementing quality policy frameworks and standards.

The organisational level *resilience* has been assessed especially when targeting positive outcomes. Lengnick-Hall & Beck, (2011) bring the argument that 'an organisation's capacity for *resilience* is a multilevel collective attribute emerging from the capabilities, actions, and interactions of individuals and units within the firm' (p. 253).

Resilience has been defined as a system's capacity to absorb shocks and implement changes while keeping the most important structures and functions (Gunderson, 2010, in Profiroiu & Nastacă, 2021, p. 103). It has been stated that *resilience* has three main features: (a) 'equilibrium' or 'stability', (b) 'self-organization' or 'self-recovery', (c) 'innovation', (Tongyue et al., 2014 in Peng et al., 2017, in Profiroiu & Nastacă, p.104).

Other voices affirmed that *resilience* does not mean only the capacity of absorbing a shock or the recovery capacity. *Resilience* implies *adapting to a new reality*. What could appear as a first main idea is that 'there is no common definition or a standard set of variables that would certainly influence *resilience*, but there are some common features of this concept.' (Profiroiu, & Nastacă, 2021, p.105). It is possible to measure the *resilience* of a country, of a region, or a community in face of economic, social, or environmental shocks. Still the *resilience* of a *system* makes it strong or not.

The concept of *adaptive governance* (AG) emerged, referring to modes of managing uncertainty and complexity in socio-ecological systems (Dietz, Ostrom & Stern, 2003, Walker et al., 2004; Folke, 2006 in Țiclău, et al., 2020, p. 171). *Turbulent governance*, they argue, requires public organizations to face governance challenges of certain kinds – situations where events, demands, and support interact and change in highly variable, inconsistent, unexpected or unpredictable ways (Ansell & Trondal, 2018, in Țiclău, et al., 2020, p. 43). *Turbulence* is the new normality (Ansell & Trondal, 2018, p. 43, in Țiclău, et al. 2020, p. 173), and *governance* (as a concept) needs to adapt to this new normality.

2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT/SUSTAINABILITY VS RESILIENCE

The two above mentioned concepts are at the same time different and complimentary. *Sustainability* does not offer to public administration the *creation* of new concepts, but the *simultaneity* in considering these concepts already known and important to public administration (Leuenberger, 2006). Within the *public administration* domain, *sustainability* is a tenet which increases the awareness of short-run and long-run *goals*. On the other hand, *sustainable development* focuses on *systems*, the entire system of services linked to public housing consumption, such as education, job training, health services, food distribution, community safety, and transportation which may be considered as a bundle of goods.

The majority of researchers have analysed *resilience* 'as a major factor for building a *sustainable* future, as a *resilient system* will have the capacity to bounce back or forward towards *sustainable development*. Economic, social, and environmental resilience should be treated as a whole and not separately'. The three types of resilience included in a system based on three factors, are: *the assets*, *the engine*, and *the outcomes*. The *assets* are constituted by human, natural, social, and built capitals. The *outcomes* are considered various indicators of well-being (health, employment, happiness, household income, satisfaction, etc.). The *engine* has the power of transforming these *assets* into *outcomes*, through institutions and processes. (Profiroiu & Nastacă, 2021: p.104). In the Rome Declaration (2017), the Member States affirmed that their purpose is to 'make the EU stronger and *more resilient*, through even greater unity and solidarity amongst us and the respect of common rules'.

The European Union considers that strengthening *resilience* depends on *cooperation* and *solidarity* between states and on their capacity to respect all the imposed rules (Profiroiu & Nastacă, 2021: p.106).

As the concept of *institutional resilience* has given birth to many analyses and opinions, a conceptual framework has been developed. More than the conceptual framework, there is the immediate reality of the medical crisis created by the Covid-19 pandemic and of its economic impact. It is hoped that public administration will be able to help economies to recover and be prepared to manage new medical and other types of crises that will appear. The mentioned framework is believed to be useful for discovering the strengths and weaknesses of the public institutions where it will be applied, including a set of 11 *capacity factors* that might influence *institutional resilience*: innovation, knowledge, creativity, learning capacity, forecasting and strategic planning, adaptative capacity (flexibility) and change management, the capacity of using new technologies, stakeholders' involvement in the decision making process and in providing services, leadership and organizational management quality, transparency, human resources quality, networking and cooperation capacity, policies and strategies effectiveness (Profiroiu & Nastacă, 2021:p.114).

Specific *sustainability* measurement and management frameworks for public sector organizations have also been developed. The word *myriad* is the right one when referring to international measurement frameworks for public sector organizations. Some of them have recently included management frameworks (e.g. the Sustainability Balanced Scorecard) and *excellence* models (i.e. EFQM and CAF). Other frameworks have *sustainability* as a main and specific focus: international guidelines on sustainability (e.g. IWA:4 from ISO for local authorities and ISO/DIS 26000 on Social Responsibility), and *sustainability* reporting (e.g. the GRI Supplement of Sustainability Reporting Guidelines for Public Agencies) (Parrado, & Löffler, :2010: p.6). *Sustainability* measurement frameworks are varied and have a different philosophy. There are, however, three different dimensions that help us understand the main differences among the models when measuring sustainability performance:

- sustainability as a *core focus* of the model or as one part among others.
- the *main purpose* of the instrument: *accountability* or *organizational improvement*.
- *type of measurement* system: based on 'hard' or on 'soft' indicator.

3. ROMANIA IN 2026, WHEN THE REFORMS AND INVESTMENTS WITHIN THE NATIONAL PLAN OF RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE WILL BE COMPLETED

The resistance piece of the program for Romanians and Romania are the *reforms*, a series of essential transformations, from the root, which have been postponed, it has been stated at the beginning of the Plan. That is why its authors affirmed that it is time to keep up with modern Europe, to trigger these transformations.

The *general objective* of the Romanian NPRR is directly correlated with the general objective of the MRR1, as included in Regulation 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021, Art.4. Thus, *the general objective* of the Romanian NPRR is *the development of Romania* by achieving some key programs and projects to support resilience, crisis preparedness, adaptability and growth potential, through major reforms and key investments with funds from the *Recovery and Resilience Mechanism*.

The *specific objective* of the NPRR is also linked to that of the mechanism, detailed in the Regulation, namely *to attract funds* provided by the European Union through Next Generation EU for achieving milestones and targets for reform and investment.

A first example that is given is/ will be *the reform of the pension system*. Such a change will mean solutions for recovery gradually, responsible. The word *increase* will be performed through a predictable formula based on economic growth.

The minimum inclusion income will be introduced which will discourage inactivity and encourage people to find a job. The salary in the budget system will know an essential transformation, a competition will be introduced for entering into the public service based on meritocratic competence, as is the case with the European Commission, so that the best of us reach the public service and let the Romanian state be a place for which it is a pride to do you work. It will be the real revolution in public administration. We will reform and depoliticize companies of the state. Judicial reforms are also essential, through the NPRR we are committed to invigorating the fight against corruption and practise a better management of human resources in the system.

It will be a Romania with rebuilt buildings and clean energy through the "Wave of Renovation" component, Romania will have 2,000 public, residential and renovated historical heritage and 1,500 renovated blocks, as well as a national register of buildings.

For the first time, in Romania in 2026, all institutions will be linked in a Government cloud, 30,000 civil servants will have digital skills and 65 institutions will have increased cyber security. Electronic identity cards for 8.5 million people will be financed from European money. Education will be digitized, and libraries will no longer decline, but will be transformed into hubs of learning and development for children and adults.

Romania will work for a modern bureaucracy in the business environment (reforming the application of the SME test and making a more transparent legislative process, simplifying the procedures for setting up/leaving the market, by establishing and operating the working points, reforming the licenses/authorizations obtaining procedures, issuing business certificates). A record amount of 2.2 billion euros, through financial instruments and various other financing schemes will be allocated to funding companies. In 2026, 3,000 SMEs will be digitized with NPRR funds, 280 of companies supported for listing on the stock exchange.

Romania of 2026 will have fewer inactive people, more children will be able to remain in families and there will be less poverty in the country, this chronic disease that all Post 1989 governments have failed to address to. Work vouchers will also be introduced for the 60,000 workers in the home services sector, the work will be formalized. At least 350 social economy structures will be newly established with at least 2450 newly created jobs.

In 2026 Romania, students will gladly attend classes because several thousand schools will finally look the way it should in the 21st century. By the end of the NPRR implementation, 6,100 of schools received resources and technology for equipping computer labs and for virtual learning. Many students will know for sure what their prospects are in life, being supported to enter dual study programs, we will have 50 new schools and 75,000 of classrooms equipped with furniture. 1,175 SMART Labs purchased for middle school units and high school education. For the first time, an extensive program of nurseries establishment will work. There will be 140 operational nurseries and 412 complementary services, with learning and play areas for children.

Through the NPRR tourism destinations will be encouraged, highlighting objectives and routes too little out of the box so far. Real treasures will be discovered: 10 museums built or rehabilitated and enhanced, using new technologies; will be put in value 30 castles, 95 churches and monasteries, 20 curia, 20 Roman fortifications, 20 villages with traditional architecture, 30 gastronomic objectives and many more.

Investments are designed so that no region lacks investment, but at the same time to help more less developed regions in the faster transition to the media European Union. Thus, the Moldova area will benefit from a major capital injection. Through funding the A7 and A8 motorways, which will connect the region with Bucharest and Transylvania, will be provided

fast connection that will allow an increase in the level of foreign investment and implicitly of places of well-paid work. The Southwest region will have pilot projects with natural gas networks in combination with hydrogen, taking into account that it is the weakest connected region in Romania to the natural gas distribution infrastructure, with counties such as Mehedinți and Dolj where the connection is almost non-existent. Less developed regions such as the South-East, South-Mountaineering, Central, North-West and West will also benefit from significant funding in areas

such as education, health, renewable energy, energy efficiency, transport, water systems, afforestation. Last but not least, although economically Bucharest-Ilfov region is very developed, reaching in 2018 a level of 152% of the average GDP of the European Union, the NPRR proposes a series of relevant investments for this area such as subway infrastructure, in the field of health, in the area of energy efficiency and in education infrastructure.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Adopting Țiclău & collabs' statement (2020 p. 178) regarding 'the modern world as a highly unpredictable beast', traditional ways of solving problems will lead to an expected result. Any kind of solution should rest on a correct, objective analysis of the causes – this means a correct diagnosis of the current environment which is fundamental for finding workable solutions. Integration of complexity and exponential change means that:

- (1) the concept of governance needs to evolve along with the 'world in which it resides';
- (2) resilience becomes a sine qua non condition for success of any (good) governance process;
- (3) one should not forget about the leadership component and the importance of integrating resilience as an essential characteristic of leadership (Țiclău, Hințea & Andrianu, 2019)

According to Nica, (2015 p.36) 'accountability mechanisms need to be inclusive and to engage all segments of the population. Independent audit institutions can help review implementation. Governments must take the lead in defining national targets and baseline data'.

We do hope that the impact of the NPRR will be visible for a much longer period of time and will have many effects after 2026. The reforms and investments undertaken under the plan envisage economic sustainable development. The reforms proposed in the NPRR will have a far-reaching effect on the Romanian economy and society for at least the next decade. On the other hand, the impact certain measures in the NPRR will be noticeable only after the implementation period of the NPRR.

Public administration reform will ensure a transition to a more efficient public policy and public sector decision-making that will be visible mainly towards the end of the NPRR and in the period after.

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