

Romanian Smart Governance for Smart Cities needs intergovernmental coordination and dissemination of knowledge: good practices from Estonia and Poland

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Since the beginning after 1990's, the Smart City concept has been mainly associated with the use of information, communication, technology (ICT) to improve the different areas of city management (mobility, administration, health, education and so on). Being "smart" does not refer to a characteristic of the city itself, but to the use of technology as "a tool" to respond to the challenges that urban growth faces.

The 12 Principles that are enshrined in the Strategy on Innovation and Good Governance at local level (The Council of Europe, 2011) for a good governance are: fair conduct of elections, representation and participation; responsiveness; efficiency and effectiveness; openness and transparency; rule of law; ethical conduct; competence and capacity; innovation and openness to change; sustainability and long term orientation; sound financial management; human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion and accountability. The Smart governance is identified as a "good thing" characterized through the participation of citizens in decision-making, public and social services that integrate technology in their operation, government transparency and a set of specific political strategies and perspectives.

This article aims at analyzing the governance related with the implementation of Smart Cities in Romania and to identify if there are any intergovernmental coordination. For smart cities to function efficiently, multiple levels of government (local, regional, national, and even supranational) must align their policies, resources, and technologies. Without coordination, country ends up with fragmented initiatives, redundant infrastructure, and a whole lot of wasted taxpayer money. Political actors play an integral part in fostering or hindering the success of intergovernmental coordination. Ideally, such coordination allows governmental actors to increase both the effectiveness and legitimacy of public decisions. But, in Romania the consultation procedure and policy advice are formal rather than practical, so the public policies coordination system focused more on procedural dimension of public policy formulation. According to the World Bank Romania's public administration has a culture of initiating policies without analytical foundation and impact assessment. A more serious shortcoming is the lack of political credibility and legitimacy in the Romanian public system.

To minimize redundant paperwork, improve efficiency, and enhance citizen experience European Union (EU) adopted in 2018 the Single Digital Gateway Regulation to mandate the Once Only Principle of European entails that public administrations do not request from citizens and businesses to provide data that are already held by any public competent authority -even foreign authorities-, but take actions to share these data always in respect of data protection regulations and other applicable legal requirement.

Romania is facing a digital paradox. Despite Romanian IT&C sector has experienced continuous growth over the last decade, government digitalization failed his target of

implementation. The current status of e-government IT systems, of the implementation of digital public services in Romania reveals very different levels between the institutions that implement, administer, and operate digital public services. Efforts have been made to digitize administrative processes, such as online business registration and digital public service access (such as the Ghiseul.ro online payment system for public services and the Virtual Private Space (SPV) for tax-related services). Romania has introduced open data platforms (such as data.gov.ro) to improve government transparency and citizen engagement, but the process but the process faced the reluctance of some institutions that were self-financing from the funds accumulated based on access to their information (e.g. National Agency for Cadastre and Land Registration). This affects both public institutions and citizens, because all digital public services should work coherently together, otherwise the traditional delivery mode is better than partially digitized services. External planning, that includes visits to other cities and systematical search for new knowledge, must be a step in the right direction of a good Smart City Strategy, but the application of good practices from senders' localities is not always welcome for the citizens of the receiving community.

Romania must learn from Estonia that created a single, unified e-Government platform that integrates all public services supported by a national AI and cybersecurity framework for digital trust. Estonia's X-Road is a secure interoperability platform that allows government agencies, businesses, and citizens to exchange data seamlessly. It eliminates redundant paperwork and ensures that public services operate efficiently in real time. Estonian citizens and residents receive a digital identity card (with possibility of electronic signature) that allows them to access government services online. Estonia was the first country to integrate blockchain technology into its government systems, ensuring data integrity and cybersecurity. The technology is used in health records, legal documents, and public registries, minimizing fraud and cyber threats. In Estonia, starting to elementary school children are learning about online services and the elderly, also, are informed by the huge importance of digital and cyber knowledge. These results are the consequence of cooperation between universities and the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Education and Research to increase the awareness of cyber threats. In Estonia, local interests are represented towards the central government via the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM), an association that was established as a result of the merger of the Association of Rural Municipalities of Estonia (AME) and the Association of Estonian Cities (AEC) in 2018. With a view to uniform representation of local authorities' interests vis-à-vis the central government, the AECM (previously the AEC and AME jointly) runs what is called the Local Government Associations Co-operation Assembly (LGACA). The AECM also plays an active role in representing local interests in European affairs.

Romania has a strong cybersecurity sector (thanks to its skilled IT workforce), but government institutions are still vulnerable to cyber threats. Directorate (DNSC) is working on strengthening digital defenses, but corruption and poor implementation remain hurdles.

Poland is ahead because it has several strategic frameworks that guide smart city development and digital transformation and stronger (intermunicipal) regional cooperation. Krajowa Polityka Miejska 2030 (KPM 2030) (National Urban Policy 2030) adopted in 2022 aligns national goals with local smart city projects. The Polish Association of Cities coordinates municipal collaboration and funding allocation, it is the oldest Polish organization of local governments since 1917 (now representing 353 cities inhabited by over 79% of the country's urban population). The National Centre for Research and Development (NCBR) supports local governments with smart technology projects.

Romania lags in funding utilization, while Poland efficiently absorbs EU grants for urban tech projects. Both countries struggle with intergovernmental coordination, but Poland's larger cities (as Warsaw, Kraków, Gdańsk, Gdynia and Wrocław) actively push smart solutions. Warsaw become a smart city leadership in terms of mobility, AI-powered chatbots for citizen services

and implementation of open data platforms to improve transparency. Wrocław is one of Poland's first cities who develop a comprehensive open data portal (first launched in 2016).

To implement a smart city's strategy, it is mandatory that the decision-making of municipality's authorities be centered on the well-being of its citizens. Also, it is important that citizens have been properly informed and even educated to get involved in finding the best solution to some problems of local interest. Coordination has long been a challenge for the public sector, made even more difficult in recent decades by the expansion of governments and the fragmentation of administrative structures. As the number of stakeholders grows, so do competing interests in decision-making. While coordination is not an objective in itself, it is essential for effective policy design, priority-setting, and achieving better outcomes for citizens.

Excluding political instability that Romania faces it during the last decades, to improve the Romanian governance, a better coordination between Romanian authorities is necessary.

Some suggestions are: the development of an administrative culture which promotes horizontal cooperation; dissemination of the good practices of a city in implementing a project; the consultation procedure and political advice become a real practice and not just a check-off procedure, based on a systematic dialogue between the actors; a strategic framework for public policies vertically coordinated so that the achievement of the objectives has the support of the necessary resources; mechanisms for mediation and solving the conflicts or the divergences between actors involved; a solid consultation with stakeholders.

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