

CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN CONCEPTS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND THEIR LEGAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. This article presents an in-depth exploration of conceptual and legal approaches to public administration reform in European countries amid the digital transformation of the public sector. The primary aim is to analyze how classical administrative traditions, the New Public Management paradigm, and the emerging model of Good Governance are evolving under the influence of digital technologies and to determine how legal frameworks support this transition. The study is grounded in the need to understand how institutional modernization can balance efficiency, accountability, and democratic legitimacy in rapidly changing information environments. The research applies a comparative legal and administrative methodology, synthesizing structural-functional analysis with systematization of legal norms and institutional practices. The analysis considers regulatory developments at both the European Union and national levels, as well as structural adjustments in public administration aimed at incorporating digital innovations. The methodology includes the classification of governance models, critical assessment of legislative instruments, and contextual evaluation of their operational impact in practice. The findings of the study reveal that the digital transformation of public administration in Europe does not replace traditional governance models but rather stimulates their hybridization. The classical model remains relevant where legal stability and procedural formality are essential, but it has been enhanced through digital document management and automation. New Public Management, while facilitating efficiency and performance orientation, integrates digital tools such as e-services and online performance metrics, though it faces criticism for potentially undermining democratic inclusivity. Good Governance emerges as a value-based response, incorporating digital platforms for transparency and participation, supported by robust legal safeguards like data protection, identity verification, and open data regulations. Each model shows adaptability when reinforced by targeted legal provisions that enable responsiveness to technological advancements while upholding the principles of rule of law and administrative justice. The study concludes that the future of European public administration lies in combining legal robustness with technological flexibility, ensuring that digital transformation serves public interest through transparent, inclusive, and accountable governance systems.

Keywords: public administration; European law; legal framework; digital transformation; classical model of management; new public management; good governance; e-government.

JEL Classification: F10, K24, K40, M54

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Introduction. The current stage of public administration development in European countries is marked by rapid digital transformation, which is causing fundamental changes in the public governance system and requires an appropriate legal framework. European countries are actively implementing innovative concepts of public administration, including e-governance, digital democracy, open government, and citizen-centered public services. However, these transformative processes are accompanied by a number of problems and challenges. The relevance of this issue is further intensified by the growing role of artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain technologies, and other innovative tools in the sphere of public administration, all of which demand proper legal regulation. Studying the European experience in conceptual approaches to the organization of public administration in the context of digital transformation, along with the corresponding legal support, holds significant theoretical and practical value for the advancement of public administration science and for the improvement of national administrative and legal mechanisms in this field.

Literature review. The digital transformation of public administration has emerged as a central theme in the evolution of governance structures across Europe. As governments strive to enhance transparency, efficiency, and citizen engagement, various European countries have adopted innovative governance models such as e-governance, open government, digital democracy, and smart public services. These models are not only reshaping the operational dynamics of public institutions but also raising critical questions regarding their legal underpinnings and regulatory frameworks (Lindgren & Jansson, 2013; Mergel et al., 2019).

E-governance has become one of the most widely implemented concepts, characterized by the use of digital tools to streamline bureaucratic processes, improve service delivery, and increase access to public information. The European Union (EU) has promoted this model through initiatives such as the eGovernment Action Plan and the Digital Europe Programme, which aim to facilitate cross-border digital public services and ensure interoperability between national systems (European Commission, 2021). Legal instruments, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), play a crucial role in safeguarding citizens' rights in digital interactions with the state (Kloza et al., 2020).

In tandem, the concept of open government—emphasizing transparency, accountability, and participatory governance—has gained prominence. Open data initiatives, driven by EU directives, compel public institutions to make data freely available, thereby enabling innovation, civic oversight, and informed decision-making (Janssen et al., 2012). Legal frameworks are essential in delineating the boundaries between openness and the protection of sensitive information, particularly in areas concerning national security and personal privacy.

Digital democracy introduces both opportunities and risks for public administration. While digital platforms can enhance civic engagement and participatory policymaking, they also require robust legal mechanisms to ensure electoral integrity, prevent misinformation, and uphold democratic norms in digital spaces (Sæbø et al., 2008). Furthermore, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics in administrative decision-making introduces new legal complexities,

including algorithmic transparency, accountability, and the protection of fundamental rights (Wirtz et al., 2019; Gellert, 2021).

Blockchain technology has also been explored in the context of public administration, especially for secure record-keeping, identity verification, and transparent procurement systems (Ølnes et al., 2017). However, its application demands specific legal standards to ensure compliance with public law principles, including legality, equality, and accessibility.

The diversity of European legal traditions and administrative cultures presents both a challenge and an opportunity for harmonizing digital governance frameworks. While the EU provides overarching digital strategies and legislative guidelines, member states retain considerable autonomy in implementation. Comparative studies reveal significant variation in legal approaches, institutional capacities, and public attitudes toward digital transformation (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

In Ukraine, scholars have contributed significantly to this discourse. H. Kukhareva explores the concept of good governance as an alternative to the traditional model of public administration, emphasizing the importance of accountability, transparency, and citizen participation. M. Siomych focuses on the features of contemporary models of public administration, identifying their distinctive characteristics and structural differences. Ye. Bolotina, in her works, investigates the transformation of administrative-state governance models and the adoption of modern Western concepts of public administration. Collectively, these contributions illustrate the multidimensional nature of current research in Ukrainian administrative science and its alignment with broader global trends in public sector reform.

The convergence of digital innovation and public administration in Europe is reshaping governance models and necessitating continuous legal adaptation. Interdisciplinary research at the intersection of law, technology, and public policy is crucial to developing responsive and rights-based legal frameworks. The European experience offers valuable lessons for countries seeking to modernize public administration while upholding democratic values and the rule of law.

Aims. The aim of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of contemporary European concepts of public administration—namely, the classical model of administration, New Public Management, and good governance—in the context of digital transformation.

Methodology. This research is based on an interdisciplinary methodological approach that integrates elements of comparative legal analysis, structural-functional assessment, and conceptual synthesis. The study applies a qualitative framework to examine the evolution and interaction of classical, managerial, and normative models of public administration—specifically the classical bureaucratic model, New Public Management, and Good Governance—within the conditions of ongoing digital transformation in Europe.

The authors employed comparative analysis to evaluate the legal and institutional frameworks of different European countries, particularly regarding their adaptation to digital technologies. This involved reviewing and systematizing regulatory instruments at both the supranational level (e.g., EU directives and regulations) and national legal

systems. The research methodology also included the classification of public administration concepts according to their core attributes, as well as an analysis of their practical applications in digital environments.

Structural-functional analysis was used to trace the institutional transformations of public administration systems in response to technological innovation, while conceptual generalization helped identify emerging hybrid models that integrate features of multiple governance paradigms. The study pays particular attention to legal mechanisms that support digital tools—such as electronic identification, open data, and algorithmic decision-making—and their role in ensuring accountability, transparency, and legal certainty.

The synthesis of legal norms and policy practices was conducted through the examination of official documents, legislative acts, and administrative regulations, enabling the authors to trace patterns of legal convergence and divergence among EU member states. The methodological framework thus ensures both analytical rigor and relevance to practical governance challenges in the context of digital transformation.

Results. The evolution of public administration in Europe has been deeply influenced by waves of political, economic, and technological change. In the 21st century, the acceleration of digital transformation has become a decisive factor reshaping traditional governance models and prompting the emergence of new administrative paradigms. At the core of these developments lie three dominant conceptual frameworks: the classical model of administration, New Public Management (NPM), and the concept of good governance (Table 1).

Table 1. Contemporary European Concepts of Public Administration in the Context of Digital Transformation

Concept	Core Features	Digital Applications	Advantages in Digital Era	Challenges in Digital Era
Classical Model	Hierarchy, rule-based governance, legal formality, stability	E-documentation, digital archiving, automated procedural workflows	Enhances procedural transparency, maintains legal integrity and accountability	Limited flexibility, slow adaptability to fast-changing technologies
New Public Management	Market-oriented, performance-based, efficiency-focused	E-services, digital performance indicators, customer satisfaction platforms	Increases efficiency, responsiveness, and cost-effectiveness	May overlook equity and democratic values; excessive focus on quantifiable outcomes
Good Governance	Transparency, participation, accountability, inclusivity, rule of law	Open data portals, digital public consultations, e-participation platforms, GDPR compliance	Promotes democratic values, civic trust, and citizen engagement	Requires strong legal frameworks; risks of digital exclusion and cybersecurity vulnerabilities

Source: systematized by the authors

Each of these models has been reinterpreted and, in some cases, reconfigured to respond to the unique demands and opportunities presented by digital innovation.

The classical model of public administration, rooted in Weberian bureaucracy, emphasizes hierarchical structures, rule-based decision-making, and a clear separation between politics and administration. While this model has been criticized for inefficiency and rigidity, elements of it continue to provide stability and legal predictability in many European administrative systems. In the digital era, the classical model is being partially adapted through the integration of digital workflows, electronic documentation, and automated control systems, which enhance procedural transparency and reduce bureaucratic delays without entirely dismantling traditional frameworks.

In contrast, New Public Management emerged in the late 20th century as a reaction against bureaucratic inefficiencies, advocating for market-oriented reforms, managerial autonomy, and performance-based accountability. Within the context of digital transformation, NPM has found fertile ground through the adoption of digital performance metrics, data analytics, and customer-oriented service delivery platforms. European governments have increasingly used digital dashboards, e-services, and feedback systems to measure outcomes and optimize service efficiency, mirroring private-sector practices. However, critics argue that excessive reliance on quantitative indicators may overlook broader democratic values and social equity, particularly in digitally underserved populations.

The concept of good governance has gained substantial traction in both European Union policy frameworks and academic discourse as a holistic response to the limitations of both classical and NPM models. Good governance emphasizes inclusivity, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and the rule of law. In the digital age, this model aligns well with initiatives such as open data portals, participatory digital platforms, and mechanisms for online civic engagement. European institutions have actively promoted digital tools that facilitate transparency and citizen participation, such as e-consultations and online petitions. Furthermore, legal frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) ensure that digital governance adheres to fundamental rights and data protection standards, reinforcing trust in public institutions.

Digital transformation also intersects with emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and big data analytics, which are being gradually integrated into public sector operations. These tools offer potential for enhanced forecasting, fraud detection, and more personalized public services. However, they also introduce significant legal and ethical challenges, including algorithmic bias, data security, and the risk of administrative opacity. Consequently, contemporary European public administration increasingly requires a hybrid model—one that incorporates the efficiency of NPM, the normative grounding of good governance, and the legal formalism of the classical model, all within a digitally responsive framework.

The contemporary European concepts of public administration are not being replaced but rather recalibrated under the pressure of digital transformation. The classical, NPM, and good governance models coexist in varying degrees across national contexts, adapted through legal innovation, institutional restructuring, and technological integration. The challenge for modern public administration lies in

balancing these paradigms to build systems that are not only efficient and transparent but also inclusive, rights-based, and democratically accountable in the digital age.

Legal frameworks of contemporary concepts of public administration in the context of digital transformation. The legal framework of the classical model of public administration (Old Public Management) represents a system of normative legal acts that institutionalize the bureaucratic organization of the state apparatus, a hierarchical governance structure, and a clear distribution of powers among government bodies. Key elements include civil service legislation, which regulates the status, rights, duties, appointment procedures, career advancement, evaluation systems, and accountability of public servants. Examples include France's *General Statute of Civil Servants*, Germany's *Federal Civil Servants Act*, and the UK's *Civil Service Code*. Administrative procedural legislation establishes formalized procedures for decision-making, case processing, and the issuance of administrative acts—such as the *Administrative Procedure Act* in Germany and the *Law on the Legal Regime of Public Administrations and the Common Administrative Procedure* in Spain. Budgetary legislation governs the processes of budget formation and execution, based on line-item funding, and establishes mechanisms for monitoring the use of public funds.

The *legal framework of the New Public Management (NPM)* concept in European countries comprises a set of normative legal acts that create the legal foundation for implementing market mechanisms, managerial flexibility, and result-oriented governance in the context of digital transformation. At the European Union level, NPM is supported by strategic documents aimed at modernizing the public sector. The European Commission has developed recommendations for implementing NPM elements, reflected in sectoral directives such as Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement, which provides a legal framework for competitive procedures and outsourcing in the public sector; Directive 2014/55/EU on electronic invoicing in public procurement, promoting the digitalization of financial processes; and Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, which enshrines principles of performance-based budgeting.

At the national level, the *legal implementation of NPM* is characterized by diverse approaches. The United Kingdom has developed a comprehensive legal framework, beginning with the *Citizen's Charter* (1991) and culminating in the *Digital Economy Act* (2017), which created a legal basis for the digitalization of public services. Scandinavian countries have incorporated NPM principles through civil service laws, legislation on agencies and autonomous institutions, and regulatory acts concerning performance-based management.

The **concept of Good Governance (GG)** emerged as a successor to the New Public Management paradigm, representing a qualitatively different approach to understanding public administration. Within the GG framework, governance is viewed as a complex process of political activity requiring specific democratic mechanisms for the formation and implementation of multidimensional administrative decisions. The formation of this innovative governance paradigm was driven by both practical and theoretical factors. Firstly, global transformations shifted public expectations of the

state's role, necessitating innovative approaches to governance. The emergence of GG coincided with the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. A particularly pressing issue was poverty reduction in developing countries, which could not be effectively addressed using traditional Western management tools.

Secondly, the development of Western political-administrative science and the search for appropriate responses to new challenges played a critical role. Research on European integration led scholars to recognize the limitations of state authority in addressing social problems. This diminished interest in the welfare state model, as even economically advanced countries were struggling with growing social expenditure burdens.

Thirdly, methodological factors played an important role. Most researchers note a shift from the classical subject-object model, typical of authoritarian and early democratic regimes, to a subject-subject paradigm. This paradigm reflects not vertical subordination but horizontal coordination among various social actors. While subject-object relations remain within the executive hierarchy, interaction between executive authorities, civil society institutions, and representative bodies should be based on new principles of horizontal governance. Most contemporary Western scholars identify the following as key components of Good Governance: constitutional order; democratic electoral processes; respect for human rights; the rule of law; political transparency, stability, and legal clarity; tolerance and fairness; public engagement; public spending aligned with societal goals; an independent judiciary; transparent power mechanisms; anti-corruption measures; free and independent media; information freedom; professional competence in governance; a politically neutral (meritocratic) civil service; and government accountability to the public on matters of national significance.

The **1997 UNDP conceptual document** outlined the core characteristics of Good Governance, including: participation—equal voting rights and freedom of expression; rule of law—fair legal systems for all; transparency—free access to information and processes; accountability—institutions serving all segments of society; consensus orientation—mediation between different interests; equity—equal opportunities for all; efficiency—optimal resource use; public accountability; and strategic vision—long-term development perspectives. Good Governance does not reduce the role of the state but emphasizes that neither the state alone nor society independently can effectively address public challenges. The boundaries between state and society become more flexible, with responsibilities determined through negotiation.

The **legal framework for Good Governance in European countries** comprises a comprehensive system of normative acts at multiple levels. The European Commission has developed a range of directives and regulations that set common standards for good governance in the digital environment.

The legal foundations of public administration concepts in the context of digital transformation have been systematized in Table 2. At the national level, European countries implement Good Governance principles through constitutional provisions, public administration and e-governance laws, and sector-specific regulations.

Table 2. Legal frameworks of public administration concepts in the context of digital transformation

Model	Core Legal Features	Examples of Legal Acts	Implementation in Digital Era
Classical Model (Old Public Management)	Bureaucratic organization, hierarchy, rule-based authority, legal formalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civil Service Legislation: regulates rights, duties, appointments, promotions, and accountability (e.g., France's <i>General Statute of Civil Servants</i>, Germany's <i>Federal Civil Servants Act</i>, UK's <i>Civil Service Code</i>) - Administrative Procedure Laws: govern decision-making procedures (e.g., Germany's <i>Administrative Procedure Act</i>, Spain's <i>Law on the Legal Regime of Public Administrations</i>) - Budget Laws: regulate budget formation, execution, and control over public funds 	Digital archiving, automated workflows, electronic document circulation supporting traditional hierarchical structures
New Public Management (NPM)	Market mechanisms, performance orientation, managerial flexibility, efficiency	<p>EU Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement (outsourcing, competition) - Directive 2014/55/EU on e-invoicing in public procurement - Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 on performance-based budgeting <p>National Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UK: <i>Citizen's Charter</i> (1991), <i>Digital Economy Act</i> (2017) - Scandinavia: laws on civil service, agency governance, and results-based management 	Legal frameworks support competitive procurement, digital service delivery, outsourcing, and digital financial systems
Good Governance (GG)	Transparency, participation, rule of law, human rights, accountability, equity, strategic vision	<p>EU Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - GDPR (Regulation EU 2016/679): data protection - Directive 2019/1024: open data and reuse of public information - Regulation EU 910/2014 (eIDAS): electronic ID and trust services <p>National Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Estonia: <i>Public Information Act</i>, <i>E-Governance Act</i> - Germany: <i>E-Government Act</i> and sectoral norms 	Legal systems enable transparency, citizen participation, open data policies, digital rights protection, and cross-sector coordination

Source: systematized by the authors

For instance, Estonia has enacted the Public Information Act and the E-Governance Act, which provide the legal foundation for e-governance. Germany ensures legal support for Good Governance through the E-Government Act (E-Government-Gesetz), supplemented by sectoral regulations.

Discussion. The study of contemporary European concepts of public administration in the digital era reveals a multidimensional and transitional landscape. The classical model, New Public Management (NPM), and Good Governance (GG) each represent distinct responses to the evolving demands placed on the public sector, yet under the pressure of digital transformation, these models are increasingly interlinked rather than mutually exclusive. Their coexistence within modern

administrative systems demonstrates a gradual shift from rigid paradigms to adaptive, hybrid forms of governance.

The classical model, rooted in hierarchy, stability, and legality, continues to serve as a foundational structure for public administration in many European countries. While it has often been critiqued for its inefficiencies and inflexibility, its emphasis on rule of law and procedural rigor remains crucial, especially in contexts requiring legal certainty and administrative predictability. The integration of digital tools into this model—such as electronic documentation, automated workflows, and data archiving—has enhanced transparency and improved bureaucratic efficiency. However, this adaptation is largely procedural rather than structural, and the model still struggles to meet the demands for participatory governance and service personalization.

By contrast, the New Public Management paradigm aligns more readily with digital innovation. Its focus on efficiency, decentralization, and performance measurement complements the capabilities offered by technologies such as data analytics, e-services, and feedback platforms. Digital dashboards and service performance indicators are key tools in achieving the NPM objective of results-based governance. However, this model also presents risks. The prioritization of cost-effectiveness and customer satisfaction metrics can lead to a narrow interpretation of public value, potentially undermining democratic principles, social equity, and rights-based governance, especially in under-connected or marginalized communities.

The Good Governance model emerges as a normative response to the limitations of both the classical and NPM approaches. It emphasizes transparency, inclusivity, rule of law, accountability, and citizen participation—values that are increasingly vital in the digital age. This model is well-suited to the opportunities provided by digital transformation, particularly in enabling open government, civic engagement through digital platforms, and protection of rights via robust data governance frameworks such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Nonetheless, implementing Good Governance requires more than digital infrastructure; it demands political will, institutional coordination, and public trust.

Importantly, the study underscores the centrality of legal frameworks in mediating these governance transformations. EU-level regulations, national laws, and sector-specific legal acts establish the foundation for digital governance practices and ensure that innovation is balanced with constitutional and democratic norms. The diversity of legal traditions across Europe presents both challenges and opportunities in harmonizing these frameworks while respecting national autonomy.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that contemporary European public administration is moving toward a hybrid model that blends elements of the classical, NPM, and GG approaches. The pressure of digital transformation is not eliminating older models but compelling their integration into a more dynamic, flexible, and legally anchored system of governance. This hybridity allows institutions to combine procedural legitimacy with innovation, responsiveness, and inclusivity.

Conclusions. The research confirms that digital transformation is a driving force reshaping the conceptual foundations and practical realities of public administration in European countries. The transition toward digital governance has not resulted in the

abandonment of classical models but has instead stimulated their adaptation, integration, and, in many cases, hybridization with more modern frameworks such as New Public Management (NPM) and Good Governance (GG).

Each of the three conceptual models examined—classical public administration, NPM, and GG—offers distinct advantages and faces unique challenges in the digital era. The classical model provides procedural stability and legal integrity, but its hierarchical structure often limits flexibility and responsiveness. NPM, with its focus on efficiency and performance, leverages digital tools for service optimization yet risks prioritizing metrics over values such as inclusivity and accountability. The Good Governance model emerges as the most holistic, promoting democratic participation, transparency, and equity while aligning effectively with the legal standards and human rights protections required in the digital age.

The legal frameworks underpinning these models are multi-layered, combining EU-level regulations, national legislation, and sector-specific laws that together shape the institutional environment for digital transformation. Notable examples include the GDPR, public procurement directives, open data regulations, and national e-governance acts, all of which are essential for ensuring that the shift toward digital administration respects the rule of law and safeguards citizens' rights.

The study reveals a clear movement across Europe toward hybrid governance systems that synthesize elements from all three models. These hybrid systems aim to balance legality, efficiency, and democratic legitimacy by embedding digital tools into accountable and citizen-oriented administrative processes. The success of this transformation, however, depends not only on technological capacity or legal compliance but also on political will, institutional adaptability, and public trust.

In conclusion, European experience demonstrates that digital transformation is not merely a technological upgrade but a structural shift in how public authority is exercised and legitimized. Contemporary public administration must be understood as a dynamic and evolving system—legally grounded, digitally capable, and normatively committed to serving the public interest in an inclusive, transparent, and accountable manner.

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