

Editorial

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Will artificial intelligence be the most powerful accelerator of innovation in public institutions?

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What impact advanced digital infrastructures, i.e. artificial intelligence systems, have and will have on a complex system such as the public administration system? Will they help us to make administrations more efficient? Or make their actions less swampy?

An initial clarification is needed. We are referring not only to the central state, which also has its peculiarities and is worth discussing later; we actually refer to the public system as a whole, including public administrations falling under each level of government. In fact, individual administrations, beyond their constitutional, regulatory, and managerial specificities, are part of a composite, structured system, the components of which must interact within the various administrative procedures with their specificities, bringing their own point of view, in the exercise of a given function, in that “game” where different interests are “weighed”, aimed at the use of discretion.

In this context, the intertwining of the activities of individual administrative entities, in terms of *management*, i.e., interactions regarding their choices, coordination of timing and synchronization of procedural steps, compatibility of *management* styles of different subjects, make it necessary to highlight the problems that emerge in their concrete operation. This is necessary to make corrections, also thanks to advanced digital techniques, with the use of concrete data, based also on past experience, aimed at solving the so-called “management bottlenecks” (the inability, that is, of different subjects to reach shared solutions to problems), which often create that bureaucratic swamp, namely a deadlock and the inability to make decisions.

Therefore, to govern complex structures it is necessary to use data and past experience, resulting from an organizational structure whose management is data-centered. To this end, the strategic actions initiated with the Nrrp, especially *cloud* systems, go in the right direction. They create an infrastructure that is essential to overcome organizational and management segmentation. They pool a shared system of information, which is the basis for any decision-making process. Of course, it is necessary to rethink the architecture of the central state and the institutional system to adapt it to an organizational model without barriers, without unnecessary inter-organizational transaction costs, albeit for sharing acts and data needed to make shared decisions. What is required is not only a redesign of structures; the entire process of reinventing public work needs to be accompanied by recruitment and training processes in line with the demands posed by the massive use of advanced technologies.

“If the world changes, what is the role and function of the public administration (Pa) in this new scenario? How will the transition to a new and modern Pa be achieved? What are the actions to be taken to achieve a paradigm shift in the public sector as well?” These questions were raised in the first editorial (2018) and subsequently repeated through its *Call for papers*: RIPM has tried to provide solutions and new interpretations, through an open debate, always aimed at expressing innovative - even comparative - research and study lines, in an effort to enhance a plurality of ideas and positions. This challenge, especially the one of anticipating and implementing changes, such as those

produced (directly and/or indirectly) by the use of artificial intelligence in public administration, is renewed in this issue, which again revolves around the ambition of the Journal to answer the following question: “Will artificial intelligence be the most powerful accelerator of innovation in public institutions?”

In this perspective, the first contribution of the “*Special Focus*” section, entitled “Risks and Opportunities for the Pa in the Age of Artificial Intelligence,” provides an overview of the opportunities and risks that Ia presents for the Pa, outlining best practices to ensure its responsible, fair and effective use, taking into account the requirements of transparency, accountability and protection of citizens’ fundamental rights. The Authors (Petrocelli, Rinaldi and Rollin) suggest a “*post-digital government*” approach, for an effective development and implementation of Ia systems in public administrations; they highlight trends, implications and perspectives, as well as challenges and opportunities for the Pa in adopting Ia within a regulatory framework (first and foremost, EU) that is still evolving, for the purpose of implementing projects that “offer not only a medium-high degree feasibility, but also a significant creation of public value.” Equally interesting is the *overview* of Ia applications in the public sector, in terms of growth and geographic spread and case studies, including in our country.

The second article in the *Special Focus* is entitled “How to Look at Business Planning in the Age of Artificial Intelligence” and provides “guidance on how to look at planning in the Pa context and prevent errors

in strategic decision making.” The Author (Palombi), at the end of a multidisciplinary analysis (ranging from history to economics, from *management* to philosophy, even to myth), emphasizes the meaning and the role to be attributed, also indicating the way to look at, forecasting (and therefore business planning), as a useful tool to make decisions (in expanding knowledge about the present), in the age of artificial intelligence.

In the Dialogues section of the Journal, the first article, “Digitization and Environmental Information: a Critical Analysis of Public Administration Information Systems,” follows up the contributions of the Special Focus, proving that digitization is an “organizational phenomenon.” In particular, the Author (Zandonà), in his research focused on data about the self-checks prescribed by integrated environmental authorizations and the data populating the registers of emissions and transfers of pollutants. He shows that “public administrations are unable to make qualitatively suitable information available to users, thus confirming the need for ad hoc structured Ict to manage the complexity of processes (...) and offers a possible solution to the problems encountered, consisting of new software to govern the entire information flow, developed from systems already in use that have shown to be of interest.

The second article in this section, “The sustainability reports of Italian public universities: circulation and state of the art,” combining theoretical and application aspects, proposes “an exploratory investigation of the sustainability report adopted

by Italian public universities, based on the realization of an empirical analysis aimed at verifying the level of circulation of this (...) internal and external communication tool.” The Author (Soverchia) is in favor of further and new verifications, aimed at assessing the increase in the number of universities that choose to draw up a sustainability *report*, as well as the quality of the documents themselves, and hypothesizes that the implementation of the Rus - Gbs *standard* may constitute “an element to insist on the ongoing path.”

Also in the same section, the essay “Participatory evaluation of public organizational *performance* according to OIV (Independent Evaluation Bodies, IEBs)” follows up the various contributions that, from different angles, have already examined *performance* measurement and evaluation

systems within the Pa. After a theoretical framing, the Author (Sanchietti), illustrates his research activity, conducted on the basis of a questionnaire composed of open and closed questions, aimed at deepening the IEBs’ point of view on participatory evaluation, about the enhancement of the latter to foster the creation of public value, as well as on the subject of implementation. The analysis of the existing evidence is fully illustrated in the *paper*; however, a greater degree of feedback from IEBs in local rather than central public administrations should be noted.

The contributions in this volume, “capturing what is happening in external administrations and the external environment,” confirm the Journal’s specific aptitude for listening, putting together a multiplicity of knowledge and information.