TOWARD LEARNING CITIES IN ROMANIA: ENHANCING ACCESS TO LITERATURE THROUGH PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE IN REȘIȚA

Ionelia HÎRJU[*]*, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania, ionelia.hirju@snspa.ro*

Abstract

This paper analyzes how digital cultural initiatives implemented in public transportation contribute to the development of the Smart Learning City concept in medium-sized Romanian cities. Building on my previous research, which established public interest in digital literature in metropolitan areas such as Bucharest, I proposed and implemented a pilot project in a UNESCO Learning Cities Network member city. The proposal was subsequently embraced by TUReșița and developed collaboratively into a pilot project integrated into a more sustainable framework, with Reșița serving as the primary case study for assessing contextual feasibility and administrative dynamics.The research objectives focus on two main axes: (1) measuring the behavioral patterns and engagement levels with digital reading tools in transit, and (2) evaluating the institutional agility and openness of local administrations toward "Urban Living Lab" initiatives. The adopted methodology is mixed and exploratory, centered on the implementation of the "Journey Through Culture" project. This involved the strategic placement of QR codes in public transport vehicles to facilitate free access to digital literature, access to information about the services offered by TUReșița, and localized historical content. Data collection was triangulated through the automated monitoring of the QR scans interactions and a qualitative assessment of user satisfaction.

Furthermore, the study analyzes the administrative trajectory, highlighting the role of Law no. 544/2001 and Law no. 52/2003 in fostering a Quadruple Helix collaboration between academia, the transport operator (TUReșița), the municipality, and the cultural sector. The results confirm that public transportation serves as a vital hub for informal learning, with usage peaks correlating with urban transit routines. While the study records a high satisfaction rate, a critical analysis of the "engagement funnel" reveals a significant gap between passive access and active feedback. The findings suggest that the transition to a Smart Learning City is driven less by high-cost technology and more by administrative agility and the localization of content. The permanent institutionalization of the project in Reșița underscores the potential for medium-sized cities to democratize culture and strengthen urban learning ecosystems through strategic, low-cost digital interventions.

Keywords: Smart Learning City, UNESCO Learning Cities, Public Transportation, Urban Living Lab, QR Codes.

[*] PhD Candidate in Administrative Science, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania, ORCID iD: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6756-7907.