Anticipatory Governance in Romania's Polycrisis Era

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Abstract

This paper examines the role and limits of anticipatory governance in Romanian public administration in the context of a polycrisis shaped by overlapping economic, health, geopolitical, and fiscal crises. It starts from the premise that, although anticipatory governance has become increasingly relevant in turbulent governance environments, there is still limited understanding of how it is perceived and applied in Romania. The paper asks two main questions: how anticipatory governance is understood within public administration, and what factors limit its implementation.

The study uses an exploratory qualitative research design based on six semi-structured interviews conducted in March-April 2026 with experts in public administration affiliated with the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Babeș-Bolyai University. The interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis in order to identify recurring patterns in expert understandings of anticipation, crisis response, institutional constraints, and the role of expertise in policymaking.

The findings show that anticipatory governance is generally understood not as prediction, but as preparedness under uncertainty through scenario-building, foresight, and preventive thinking. At the same time, Romanian public administration is perceived as predominantly reactive, shaped by crisis pressure, short-term political incentives, fragmented institutional capacity, underused expertise, and weak incentives for prevention. Although anticipatory elements do exist in certain institutions, sectors, and local administrations, they remain unevenly developed, formalistic, and weakly connected to actual decision-making.

The paper concludes that anticipatory governance in Romania is not absent, but only partially institutionalized. Its development is constrained less by a total lack of future-oriented ideas than by their marginal position within a governance system dominated by urgency, short-termism, and limited administrative and political support for foresight-based action.

Keywords: anticipatory governance, polycrisis, public administration, reactive governance, Romania