

Zolak Poljašević, Branka; Gričnik, Ana Marija; Žižek, Simona Šarotar

Article

Human resource management in public administration: The ongoing tension between reform requirements and resistance to change

Administrative Sciences

Provided in Cooperation with:

MDPI – Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, Basel

Suggested Citation: Zolak Poljašević, Branka; Gričnik, Ana Marija; Žižek, Simona Šarotar (2025) : Human resource management in public administration: The ongoing tension between reform requirements and resistance to change, Administrative Sciences, ISSN 2076-3387, MDPI, Basel, Vol. 15, Iss. 3, pp. 1-27,
<https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15030094>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/321238>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Article

Human Resource Management in Public Administration: The Ongoing Tension Between Reform Requirements and Resistance to Change

Branka Zolak Poljašević ¹, Ana Marija Gričnik ² and Simona Šarotar Žižek ^{2,*}

¹ Faculty of Economics, University of Banja Luka, 78 000 Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina; branka.zolak-poljasevic@ef.unibl.org

² Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Maribor, SI-2000 Maribor, Slovenia; ana.gricnik@student.um.si

* Correspondence: simona.sarotar-zizek@um.si

Abstract: Human resource management (HRM) plays a critical role in shaping public administration by ensuring the efficiency, effectiveness, and adaptability of public institutions. In post-socialist European countries, HRM reforms have been central to broader public sector transformations aimed at increasing transparency, meritocracy, and efficiency. However, these reform processes are often hindered by institutional inertia, political influences, and resistance to change. This study examines how reform requirements and resistance to change influence the transformation of HRM practices in public administration across post-socialist European countries. Using a structured literature review approach, this study systematically analyzes peer-reviewed academic research published in quality journals indexed in the Web of Science database. A purposive and criterion-based sampling strategy was applied to select relevant studies that address HRM reforms, institutional challenges, and governance dynamics within the post-socialist context. Findings indicate that historical legacies, politicization, and institutional resistance remain significant barriers to the successful implementation of HRM reforms. This study also highlights that while legal and procedural adjustments have been made, many public administrations struggle with the practical application of reform policies due to entrenched bureaucratic cultures and limited professionalization of HRM functions. By providing a structured synthesis of existing research, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of HRM transformation in post-socialist public administrations. It also identifies areas wherein further empirical research is needed to explore potential strategies for overcoming barriers to reform.

Keywords: human resource management; public administration; reform; resistance to change; historical legacy



Received: 4 December 2024

Revised: 25 February 2025

Accepted: 5 March 2025

Published: 11 March 2025

Citation: Zolak Poljašević, B., Gričnik, A. M., & Šarotar Žižek, S. (2025). Human Resource Management in Public Administration: The Ongoing Tension Between Reform Requirements and Resistance to Change. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(3), 94. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15030094>

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

HRM plays a pivotal role in enhancing organizational performance by optimizing human capital, aligning employee competencies with strategic objectives, and fostering innovation. In the public sector, HRM is equally crucial, as governments must balance efficiency, accountability, and service quality while managing limited resources (Andrews & van de Walle, 2013; Biščak & Benčina, 2019). Effective HRM practices, such as recruitment, training, and performance management, are essential for professionalizing public administration and ensuring responsive governance (Profiroi & Negoită, 2022; Vignieri, 2018; Castelo & Gomes, 2024). However, the implementation of HRM reforms in public administration, particularly in post-socialist European countries, remains a persistent challenge.

Institutional inertia, politicization, and historical legacies continue to shape HRM practices, often obstructing efforts toward modernization and meritocracy (Staroňová, 2017; Coman & Volintiru, 2021). While reform frameworks such as New Public Management (NPM) and Good Governance have influenced public sector HRM strategies, their application in post-socialist countries is complex, given the persistence of bureaucratic traditions and discretionary decision making (Profiroiu & Negoită, 2022; Staroňová & Gajduschek, 2013).

This study aims to analyze relevant research on HRM in public administration across post-socialist countries, focusing on the need for reforms and resistance to change, which remains a prominent challenge in these European countries. The main research question addressed in this paper is “How do reform requirements and resistance to change shape HRM reforms in post-socialist European public administrations, as reflected in selected academic studies?” The analysis is based on the premise that resistance to change, deeply rooted in bureaucratic traditions and political structures, significantly hampers the success of HRM reforms.

While research on HRM in public administration has examined various reform approaches, challenges unique to post-socialist European countries require further investigation. Public administration in these countries continues to be shaped by centralized governance legacies, politicized HRM practices, and discretionary decision making, all of which impede professionalization efforts and obstruct the implementation of performance-based management. Such structural and cultural constraints generate significant resistance to change, affecting the pace and effectiveness of HRM reforms. By examining the interaction between institutional, political, and historical factors, this study contributes to the existing discourse on HRM reform processes in these contexts.

The paper consists of several sections organized according to the IMRAD method, which provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the complex dynamics of HRM reforms in public administration, with a focus on post-socialist European countries. The Theoretical Background section examines key HRM challenges in public administration, including the influence of NPM and Good Governance. The Methodology section outlines the selection criteria for the qualitative analysis, while the Results and Discussion section presents key findings on the barriers to HRM reform. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes insights, discusses the limitations of the study, and suggests directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Conceptual Foundations of Public Administration and the Changing Role of Employees

Public administration can generally be described as a system that integrates multiple institutions and operates according to the rules and norms of society (Latkovskyi, 2020). Public administration has a broad scope of activity, defined by each country according to its own national values and goals, tradition of public services, and established political culture (Jambrač, 2021). Historically, the definition and understanding of public administration have evolved with societal changes. In many countries, the concept of public administration has shifted from being seen as an ‘inviolable authority’ to ‘administration as a partner,’ and eventually to ‘administration at the service of citizens’. In the 21st century, public administration is expected to be responsive and adaptable, which requires flexibility, the stability of management systems, and the ability to perform effectively in unexpected situations (Jambrač, 2021).

As the paradigm of public administration has evolved, the perception of the significance and role of employees has correspondingly transformed. Since the emergence of capitalism, the treatment of employees in the labor market has evolved from being viewed merely as ‘labor’ to being recognized as ‘human capital’ and ‘human resources’, and now as ‘human potential’ (Ciuhu & Vasile, 2019). This concept of ‘potential’ reflects the complex

nature of individuals, who are not simply ‘order executors’. Instead, they are multidimensional beings with psychological, spiritual, moral (Kazantseva, 2022), and creative potentials, as well as unique desires and needs. In the context of public administration, human potential encompasses the collective knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, social traits, psychological characteristics, and creative capacities of employees working in public institutions to serve the public interest (Marčetić, 2008).

In the traditional public sector model, the administrative system is bureaucratized to ensure that decisions and actions are consistent, formalized, and systematically managed through predefined rules and procedures (Brown, 2004). The rational–legal bureaucracy addresses employee management through several key features. These include the division of labor based on specific functions, established protocols to safeguard against unfair termination, the use of organizational hierarchy to delegate authority, merit-based recruitment, and, generally, the implementation of a professional civil service system (Schroeder, 1992). However, the unitary system encountered obstacles due to financial crisis and growing governmental efforts to scale back services in response to increasing criticism of ‘big government’ (Shim, 2001). The need for a new management approach that allows increased flexibility in staffing is rooted in the discourse on improving the responsiveness and efficiency of public administration.

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Public Administration Reforms

NPM introduced private sector management principles into public administration, shifting the focus towards efficiency, performance-based management, and decentralization (Stroińska, 2020). This shift was part of a broader strategy aimed at enhancing efficiency, effectiveness, and service quality (Brown, 2004). NPM introduced several key components, including a result-oriented culture, performance management based on specific targets, strategic planning, cost recovery through user fees, risk management, decentralization of authority, and decision rights (Verbeeten & Speklé, 2015; Lapsley, 2009). Global institutions, such as the IMF, World Bank, and WTO, have supported the adoption of NPM principles. Reforms in the public sector inspired by the NPM doctrine have brought a novel perspective to HRM, integrating the idea that human resources are pivotal for achieving performance outcomes in line with the strategic goals of public organizations (Gardner & Palmer, 1997). However, these reforms led to a range of intended and unintended consequences. On the positive side, NPM has led to increased efficiency, accountability, and a shift towards more customer-oriented service delivery in many public institutions. It emphasizes performance-based management and results, which encourages public organizations to adopt a more business-like approach. At the same time, many regions have reported that, despite the introduction of private sector practices, public service delivery has not significantly improved. In some cases, quality has even declined (Lapuente & van de Walle, 2020; Mahmoud & Othman, 2021). Other negative consequences have emerged, including heightened bureaucratization (Liff, 2014) and fragmentation of public services due to decentralization (Van de Walle & Hammerschmid, 2011). Additionally, the emphasis on measurable performance has sometimes undermined collaboration. Departments compete for resources rather than working toward shared objectives (Liff, 2014), while traditional public sector values, such as equity and impartiality, have eroded.

Studies have shown that NPM reforms in Central and Eastern Europe have had mixed results. The legacy of authoritarian regimes and cultural factors often hinder the effective implementation of these reforms, leading to inconsistent improvements in governance and corruption reduction. For instance, a review of NPM literature in the region highlights the challenges of poor implementation and limited administrative capacity, which are exacerbated by political instability and lack of a unified vision for reform (Dan, 2015;

[Drechsler & Randma-Liiv, 2014](#)). Within the European context, the influence of NPM reforms is highly dependent on the institutional framework, leading to distinct management strategies and varied organizational results ([Teisman & van Buuren, 2007](#)). Despite its numerous limitations, NPM has persisted for nearly three decades.

Over time, it became clear that adjustments were necessary, as the state apparatus continued to expand alongside the growing responsibilities of public administration, contrary to initial intentions. This trend was particularly evident in EU member states and candidate countries, highlighting the need for new doctrines in the public administration theory. At the turn of the 21st century, a significant shift occurred. The EU introduced a new governance model that prioritized democratic administration and sought to restore the political legitimacy of sovereign states. This approach aims to enhance effectiveness and coherence, enabling efficient governance while strengthening the institutional capacities of European countries ([Koprić, 2009](#); cited in [Jambrač, 2021](#)). The EU, recognizing the challenges posed by state and economic transitions in emerging democracies, promotes its own concept of public administration known as Good Governance ([Manliev, 2021](#)). While NPM was rooted in a neoliberal model aimed at creating a “lean state”, Good Governance takes a fundamentally different approach. It places citizens at the center and emphasizes the democratic aspects of society, making them the primary focus of its policies and practices ([Budurina-Goreacii & Cebotari, 2021](#)). Good Governance prioritizes quality over quantity by promoting transparency in operations, participatory decision making, professionalization of administration, the rule of law, and merit-based employment. It also strengthens the role of civil society. Its ultimate aim is to establish an administration that is responsive to the needs of both the economy and citizens. The EU has played a crucial role in institutionalizing Good Governance principles through initiatives such as the 2001 White Paper on European Governance. This document defines openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence as guiding values for public administration reforms ([Anđelković, 2023](#)). These principles have significantly influenced the modernization of public administration in EU candidate countries, ensuring that reforms align with democratic governance standards and the rule of law.

2.3. HRM Challenges in Public Administration

Regardless of the dominant doctrine in public administration theory, it is evident that depoliticization and professionalization represent the universal goals of all contemporary doctrines of public administration. Achieving these goals requires the development of an efficient HRM system for public administration. Professionalizing public administration is inherently linked to the adoption of modern HRM methods and techniques ([Daniel, 2023](#); [Reina & Scarozza, 2021](#); [Baimenov, 2020](#)). The importance of this issue is evidenced by a growing body of literature demonstrating the positive impact of HRM practices on organizational performance in public administration ([Giauque et al., 2013](#); [Gogalis, 2021](#); [Kotková Strítěská & Sein, 2021](#)). To ensure the success of public administration reforms, a strategic HRM approach is essential. This involves two key aspects: strengthening institutional capacities for effective HR management in the public sector and modernizing core HR functions. These activities include recruitment and selection, training, career development, performance evaluation, and reward systems. Each of these elements contributes to optimizing employee performance and enhancing overall organizational effectiveness ([Zolak Poljašević, 2011](#)).

2.3.1. Recruitment and Selection

The hiring process in public administration is critical to ensuring that government institutions are staffed with qualified personnel capable of delivering effective services.

Competent employees play a key role in maintaining the productivity and quality of service delivery (Konateh et al., 2023). Given that the effectiveness of these services relies heavily on the knowledge, skills, and motivation of employees, the primary challenge for human resources in public administration is to recruit the most qualified candidates—those who are adequately suited for specific roles (Dujmović, 2021; Konateh et al., 2023). A major challenge for public administration today is making the sector more attractive and accessible to highly skilled young professionals. This requires recruitment, selection, and promotion methods that prioritize meritocracy, as well as continuous professional and academic training and specialization in public services (Profiroiu & Negoită, 2022). Public administration faces several hurdles in attracting talent. Public sector positions often offer less competitive salaries than those in the private sector, making it difficult to recruit skilled professionals. Additionally, public administration is sometimes perceived as less dynamic, with fewer opportunities for career advancement or skill development. This perception discourages prospective candidates from seeking government employment. Recruitment in public administration is frequently governed by strict civil service laws and regulations that are designed to ensure fairness and consistency. While these rules promote equity, they also limit flexibility, making it difficult for public institutions to respond swiftly to changing workforce needs or adopt innovative recruitment practices. The bureaucratic nature of these regulations often result in lengthy hiring processes, complicating efforts to attract high-quality candidates, particularly those with specialized skills.

A well-designed recruitment and selection process supports the principle of meritocracy, which is essential for the professionalization of public administration. When citizens perceive that government positions are fairly awarded based on open competition and merit, they are more likely to see public administration as trustworthy and reliable (Hennessy et al., 2024; Hubbell & Kreci, 2019). This trust is essential for the legitimacy of public institutions, particularly in post-socialist countries where past practices may involve nepotism or political favoritism. According to this merit principle, candidates for public administration should be selected based on their competence. In the selection process, all candidates should be treated equally, irrespective of their political affiliation, race, religion, nationality, gender, marital status, age, or disability (Vitanski, 2019). Nevertheless, ensuring equal treatment remains a challenge for public administrations (Greenan et al., 2019). Ensuring transparency in recruitment and selection is crucial for hiring the best candidates with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities for high-quality job performance. Unfortunately, in many post-socialist countries, the selection process is vulnerable to political interference and patronage (Pavlović, 2022; Kopecký & Spirova, 2011; O'Dwyer, 2004). In the context of the professionalization of public administration and increasing its efficiency, a special challenge arises in the recruitment and selection of civil servants for management positions (Ishiyama, 2000). For public administration to be truly effective, it is crucial to strike a balance between political appointees, who gain legitimacy through public trust in democratic elections, and non-political civil servants, who earn positions based on education and experience. Reforms should aim to increase the percentage of non-politically appointed professionals in management roles, thereby enhancing the professional capacity of the public administration (Lewis, 2007). In modern systems of public administration, professionals are recruited through two primary methods: internal promotion based on continuous education and training of civil servants and direct recruitment from the labor market. Both types of recruitment can be highly successful when guided by the principles of merit. Furthermore, modern recruitment methods in public administration include the use of electronic recruiting systems, websites, and social networks, which help to improve interactions between candidates and institutions and attract quality talent (Shashyna et al., 2023).

2.3.2. Training and Employee Development

In HRM theory, continuous training and employee development are considered among the most effective ways to achieve competitive advantage. Given that countries act as competitors in the international market, seeking to attract foreign investors, capital, and knowledge, as well as to export their capital, products, and services (Šimac, 2002), it is necessary to leverage all resources to enhance competitive advantage. As a key resource, public administration employees are vital to achieving these goals. Training and development in public administration not only enhance the competencies of public servants and help them perform their duties more effectively, but they are also crucial for promoting employee satisfaction (OECD, 1997), career growth, and retention (Shiri et al., 2023). For public administration, which often struggles to attract and retain young and highly skilled professionals, offering structured career development opportunities can make government employment more appealing (Proskura & Torgunakova, 2021). By fostering a culture of continuous learning and skill enhancement, training programs ensure that public servants perform their responsibilities with professionalism and accountably. Moreover, training programs that emphasize ethical standards, integrity, and compliance help to reduce instances of corruption and to build public trust in government institutions (Stevulak & Brown, 2011). By integrating both professional skill development and ethical behavior, these programs significantly enhance the overall effectiveness and credibility of public administration.

However, many public-sector organizations, particularly in post-socialist countries facing ongoing institutional and economic challenges, encounter budget limitations that hinder the implementation of comprehensive training programs. Limited infrastructure and insufficient resources further constrain the scope of training initiatives. In addition, bureaucratic rigidity within public administration often reduces flexibility in implementing dynamic training programs. Unlike private sector organizations, where training and skill development can be customized and rapidly adapted to emerging needs, public sector training is frequently constrained by bureaucratic processes. These processes often require numerous approvals, making it difficult to quickly modify training content and delivery methods in response to changing circumstances. This bureaucratic nature also creates resistance within public administration structures, slowing down the adoption of new training methods or technologies (Kwaku Ohemeng, 2014). Overcoming such inertia demands strong leadership and a dedicated approach to managing change.

2.3.3. Performance Management

Performance management in public administration is a systematic approach aimed at improving organizational effectiveness through the establishment of clear goals, performance assessments, and data-driven decision making. This process has gained prominence, particularly with the rise of NPM reforms advocating for efficiency and accountability in government operations (Garengo & Sardi, 2021). It is now widely recognized as an essential instrument of administrative reforms (Micheli & Pavlov, 2020; Castelo & Gomes, 2024). By focusing on measurable outcomes, performance management enables public administration to identify areas for improvement, enhance service delivery (Vignieri, 2018), and allocate resources more efficiently (Castelo & Gomes, 2024). However, establishing clear and measurable performance metrics is a challenge in public administration (Zainudin & Othman, 2024). One of the most significant obstacles to performance management in public administration is the presence of subjectivity and bias during the evaluation process. Unlike the private sector, where performance metrics are often linked to tangible outputs, public-sector performance is more complex and harder to measure objectively (Schnell et al., 2021). As a result, performance appraisal systems are often met with resistance from both employees and supervisors within public administration. Employees may perceive

performance evaluations as punitive rather than developmental, creating an environment of mistrust and reducing co-operation. Additionally, some supervisors may be reluctant to carry out performance appraisals because of additional workload or fear of conflict with their subordinates. Such resistance undermines the effectiveness of performance management systems and hinders meaningful feedback and development. In many countries, political interference poses a significant barrier to effective performance management. Evaluations are often influenced by political connections or favoritism, undermining the principles of meritocracy. Christensen and Læg Reid (2021) support this view, highlighting similar patterns of political interference and their detrimental impacts on performance management across various contexts. When political considerations outweigh objective assessments, the credibility of the performance management process is compromised, leading to a lack of trust among employees and poor organizational outcomes. Another major challenge for performance management in public administration is budget constraints. Public sector entities frequently struggle with limited financial resources (Sušjan, 1996), which restrict their ability to implement performance management systems effectively. These financial limitations require careful and strategic resource allocation to ensure optimal outcomes (Zainudin & Othman, 2024).

To address the aforementioned challenges related to performance measurement, public administration should establish clear and measurable performance indicators while adopting performance management as a continuous process rather than an annual event. Regular and constructive feedback helps employees to stay aligned with organizational goals and make the necessary adjustments. Moreover, public administration should emphasize the developmental benefits of performance management rather than its punitive aspects. Framing evaluations as opportunities for growth can help to reduce resistance and build trust among employees. For performance measurement systems to be effective, they must also be flexible and adaptable to the unique needs of diverse public sector organizations (De Waele et al., 2021). Furthermore, maintaining the integrity of performance management requires limiting political interference in performance evaluations.

2.3.4. Reward System

The reward system in public administration plays a crucial role in enhancing employee motivation, performance, and overall organizational effectiveness. A well-structured reward system can help attract potential employees, sustain high performance and work motivation, and influence employee satisfaction, commitment, organizational behavior, and overall performance (Zolak Poljašević & Berber, 2024). Effective reward systems are also linked to improved performance in public sector organizations (Bowman, 2010), and several characteristics of public organizations significantly impact their reward systems. The study by White and Drunker (2016) (cited in Coccia & Igor, 2018) identified four key factors. First, public accountability influences the design of reward systems, as public servants' salaries are funded through taxation, and their roles focus on delivering services for the public good. Second, the public sector is labor-intensive, meaning that staff reduction directly impacts service quality. Third, many public services function as public goods and often create monopolies, particularly in sectors with significant infrastructure costs. Finally, high union membership in public services leads to a centralized approach to reward systems, often shaped by collective bargaining. Public servants are expected to be motivated by the concept of public services rather than financial incentives, a factor which directly influences reward policies (Coccia & Igor, 2018). Salaries in the public sector are often lower than those in the private sector, making public administration less attractive for qualified candidates, particularly among younger professionals. The wage system in public administration is frequently standardized and does not offer significant rewards for exceptional performance.

or contributions to the organization. Salaries are determined based on fixed pay scales and are not linked to individual performance, which may demotivate employees and discourage them from exceeding basic job expectations (Marcinkowski et al., 2024). Additionally, rigid pay structures in the public sector, often shaped by legal regulations and collective bargaining agreements, limit the ability to adjust salaries according to labor market needs or the specific skills and competencies of employees (OECD, 2021). Incentives are rare in public administration reward systems, and benefits are regulated by law, varying from country to country. Finally, political interference can significantly influence salary determination in public administration, especially in post-socialist countries, where decisions regarding pay or raises are sometimes driven by political interests rather than employee qualifications and performance (Peters & Pierre, 2004).

To overcome these challenges, public administration must reform its reward systems, introduce greater transparency and flexibility, reduce political influence in salary decision making, and develop performance-based reward mechanisms (Marcinkowski et al., 2024; World Bank Group, 2018). Implementing these measures would enhance the attractiveness of the public sector, improve employee motivation, and increase the efficiency of public service delivery.

Effective HRM procedures directly impact not only internal organizational performance but also citizen satisfaction, as professionalized and merit-based administrative structures enhance the quality and responsiveness of public services. Moreover, a strategic approach to HRM can lead to healthier and more productive work environments, which ultimately benefit society by enhancing the quality and efficiency of public services (Demo et al., 2024; Boselie et al., 2019). Despite its importance, HRM in the public sector faces significant obstacles, including budget constraints that often limit the implementation of comprehensive HRM practices. Another significant challenge is the presence of rigid institutional frameworks that restrict flexibility in recruitment, retention, and employee management. For instance, many public sector jobs require adherence to strict civil service laws, which may impede the adoption of innovative HR approaches (Burns, 2022). Furthermore, the politicized nature of public administration can complicate HRM efforts, as civil servants must balance political expectations while maintaining impartiality and effectiveness (Burns, 2022; Boselie et al., 2019). These challenges highlight the persistent tension between administrative efficiency and political influence in public sector HRM, making reform efforts more complex and often less effective.

2.4. Legacies and Challenges in HRM Reforms in Post-Socialist Public Administration

HRM reforms in post-socialist countries face the aforementioned challenges along with unique obstacles arising from historical, economic, and social factors that influence public administration's ability to adapt to modern HRM strategies.

Public administration reforms in post-socialist countries are deeply influenced by institutional legacies, where formal administrative changes are often constrained by deeply embedded informal norms and values. Research on public administration reform in Serbia highlights these normative institutional elements as significant obstacles to the successful implementation of HRM reforms (Mojić & Jovančević, 2020). One of the key challenges is the persistent politicization of HRM practices (Staroňová, 2017; Peters & Pierre, 2004; Verheijen, 2001), where recruitment and promotion are frequently influenced by political patronage rather than being merit-based (Staroňová & Gajduschek, 2013). This fosters corruption, nepotism, and favoritism, further weakening institutional trust and discouraging reform efforts.

Resistance to HRM reforms in post-socialist countries arises from three interrelated factors: institutional rigidity, organizational inertia, and individual psychological barriers.

The neo-institutional theory of bureaucracy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) critiques public organizations for fostering rigidity and inertia, which limit their ability to adapt to changing demands (Selznick, 1957; Crozier, 1964). Excessive bureaucratization results in red tape and inefficiency, consuming resources without yielding meaningful improvements in public sector performance (Osie Bonsu, 2024). At the institutional level, weak accountability mechanisms and the discretionary power of senior officials enable the selective application of HRM policies, undermining the credibility of reforms (Thill et al., 2016).

From an organizational perspective, the emphasis on formalized procedures over innovation restricts adaptability, reinforcing resistance to HRM modernization (Torfing et al., 2020). Furthermore, rigid bureaucratic structures contribute to employee alienation and dissatisfaction, weakening motivation and engagement in reform initiatives (Osie Bonsu, 2024). On an individual level, employees accustomed to centralized decision making and lifelong job security often perceive reforms as a direct threat, leading to passive resistance or reluctance to adopt new HRM strategies. The fear of increased accountability, performance-based evaluation, and loss of informal privileges intensifies resistance, sometimes manifesting as active opposition to HRM reforms. In societies where political loyalty has historically influenced career progression, employees may hesitate to support reforms that prioritize meritocracy over political patronage (Staroňová & Gajduschek, 2013).

This combination of institutional barriers, bureaucratic inertia, and psychological resistance underscores the complexity of implementing HRM reforms in post-socialist public administrations. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that strengthens institutional accountability, modernizes HRM structures, and fosters a culture of adaptability within public administration (Coman & Volintiru, 2021). The transition of Central and Eastern European countries towards modern democratic systems has led to significant EU-driven reforms and investments aimed at improving the efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and quality of public administration (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Through initiatives such as the ComPAct and EUPACK, along with dedicated support for Eastern Partnership countries, the EU is contributing to the development of a more resilient and capable public sector. These efforts not only address immediate governance challenges but also align with the broader objectives of sustainable development and democratic accountability. However, ensuring the success of HRM reforms in public administration requires a comprehensive strategic approach. This includes not only the modernizing of HRM activities, such as recruitment, training, and performance evaluation, but also strengthening institutional capacity for effective reform implementation (Zolak Poljašević, 2011). The professionalization of public administration is central to this process, as it ensures that employees are hired and promoted based on merit and that their performance is assessed in a fair and transparent manner (Dujmović, 2021).

Continuous reform in public administration is vital for post-socialist countries to successfully adapt to evolving social, economic, and political environments. Such reforms are fundamental to achieving sustainable governance and institutional stability by improving service delivery, strengthening institutional capacity, and enhancing accountability (Rees & Hossain, 2013). Nešković (2023) emphasized the need for comprehensive changes to eliminate inefficiencies and adapt to new socioeconomic realities. Addressing issues such as politicization, weak institutional frameworks, and resistance to change is essential for building a professional, accountable, and transparent public sector. Effective recruitment, training, and performance management strategies support a merit-based and citizen-oriented administration, enhancing public service delivery and fostering trust in government institutions.

The theoretical perspectives on NPM and Good Governance highlight the evolving role of HRM in modern public administration, emphasizing the shift from traditional bureaucratic models to more flexible, strategic, and performance-driven approaches. These theoretical insights serve as a foundation for the study's broader objective—to critically analyze HRM reforms in post-socialist public administrations and assess their impact on governance outcomes.

3. Materials and Methods

This review analyzes relevant research in the field of HRM in public administration within the context of post-socialist European countries. These countries, emerging from socialist legacies, face distinct challenges in modernizing public administration to align with the principles of transparency, efficiency, and merit-based practices that characterize Western models. The main research question addressed in this paper is “How do reform requirements and resistance to change shape HRM reforms in post-socialist European public administrations, as reflected in selected academic studies”? This qualitative approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of this complex issue and offers insights into the factors that influence the effectiveness of HRM reforms. The analysis is based on the premise that factors such as historical legacies, politicization, and institutional inertia pose substantial obstacles to the successful implementation of HRM reforms.

This study is grounded in a constructivist epistemology, which aligns with the interpretative nature of qualitative research in public administration. HRM reforms in post-socialist public administrations are not static, objectively measurable phenomena; rather, they are socially constructed processes shaped by historical, institutional, and political contexts. Consequently, this research follows a constructivist ontology, assuming that reality is not universally fixed but contingent upon governance structures, policy frameworks, and stakeholder interpretations. Given this perspective, the study does not seek to establish generalizable laws but rather aims to explore how institutional structures and governance dynamics influence HRM reforms over time. A qualitative approach is most appropriate for capturing these complexities, as it allows for contextually rich and theoretically informed analysis of the factors shaping HRM reform efforts.

There are several reasons to conduct an analysis of HRM research in public administration. First, the longstanding discourse surrounding HRM practices and the factors influencing reform implementation, as well as the considerable attention this subject has received from numerous scholars, underscore the complexity and significance of the issue. Given that the objective of this research is to provide a systematic and methodologically rigorous analysis of HRM reforms in public administration, this study employs a structured selection process to analyze a sample of peer-reviewed academic works. The selection of articles was guided by clearly defined inclusion criteria, ensuring that the analyzed studies directly address HRM challenges, reform requirements, and resistance to change in post-socialist European public administrations. By applying a targeted selection strategy, this research captures relevant theoretical and empirical contributions, offering a focused and comprehensive perspective on the key challenges and opportunities in HRM reforms.

To ensure a methodologically rigorous selection of studies, this research employed a combination of purposive and criterion sampling, two widely recognized qualitative sampling strategies (Patton, 1990; Suri, 2011; Palinkas et al., 2015; Campbell et al., 2020). Purposive sampling is extensively used in qualitative research because it allows for the selection of information-rich cases that provide the most relevant insights into the research topic while ensuring methodological rigor (Patton, 2002). Instead of random selection, this method facilitates the identification of key works that best illustrate the core dimensions of HRM reforms, particularly in post-socialist public administrations. As emphasized

by [Rivera \(2016, 2018\)](#), purposive sampling enables the selection of cases based on their relevance to the research question rather than randomization. This approach ensures that the reviewed studies reflect the institutional and political factors shaping HRM reforms.

Purposive sampling is not an arbitrary process; rather, it follows well-established theoretical principles to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of findings. [Rivera \(2016\)](#) applied this technique in research on access to federal disaster assistance after Hurricane Sandy, selecting counties based on specific impact criteria before conducting probability sampling within them. Similarly, [Terman \(2014\)](#) used purposive sampling to analyze bureaucratic responses to political signals by selecting experienced procurement officers from Florida's major administrative agencies. These examples illustrate how purposive sampling is widely used to generate rich qualitative data in governance-related studies.

Beyond public administration, purposive sampling is also a dominant method in the study of complex social phenomena. [Capshew and McNeece \(2000\)](#) demonstrated how purposive sampling facilitates the selection of key informants in legal and institutional research, particularly in studies on civil protection orders. Their work shows that purposive sampling allows researchers to engage directly with individuals who possess firsthand knowledge of institutional practices, a strategy that aligns with this study's focus on selecting HRM research that directly examines reform processes in post-socialist public administration.

A more recent application of purposive sampling in governance research can be found in [Hall et al. \(2021\)](#), who examined restorative justice policy implementation by selecting education professionals based on their expertise in school discipline reforms. Their study highlights how purposive sampling allows for the targeted selection of knowledgeable participants, ensuring that research findings accurately reflect institutional realities and policy challenges. This approach closely mirrors the rationale behind the present study, which applies purposive sampling to identify and analyze scholarly work that provides in-depth examinations of HRM reforms in post-socialist public administrations.

While purposive sampling follows systematic theoretical principles, it presents certain challenges regarding replicability, as selection is based on researcher judgment and contextual relevance. [Rivera \(2018\)](#) highlights that purposive sampling, while useful for selecting cases relevant to a specific research question, inherently limits generalizability and replication due to the subjective nature of case selection. Similar concerns have been raised in other studies using purposive sampling, including those by [Terman \(2014\)](#) and [Capshew and McNeece \(2000\)](#), where case selection was highly dependent on situational factors. Consequently, identifying conceptually identical studies can be difficult, as different researchers may apply slightly different criteria when defining their sampling frames. However, despite this limitation, purposive sampling remains a valid methodological choice for investigating complex governance issues, particularly those shaped by historical and institutional factors, as it allows for a deep exploration of cases that best illustrate key theoretical dimensions.

This study also incorporated criterion sampling, which allows for systematic filtering based on predefined selection criteria and ensures that the selected literature meets specific standards relevant to the research focus. To enhance sample quality, researchers often emphasize clear selection criteria when defining the study population ([Wegner, 2013](#); cited in [Došenović & Zolak Poljašević, 2022](#)). To ensure a methodologically sound selection of sources, the journal selection process was conducted systematically, applying clearly defined inclusion criteria.

The primary objective was to identify quality, peer-reviewed academic journals that publish research on HRM in public administration with a focus on post-socialist European countries. The selection was conducted using Web of Science's Social Science Citation

Index database, which provides access to scientifically rigorous and quality journals. The search was restricted to journals specializing in public sector governance, using targeted keywords such as “public administration” and “public management” in the journal title to refine the results.

To narrow the research scope and ensure regional relevance, the analysis focused exclusively on journals published in former socialist European countries. This approach was adopted to ensure that the selected studies reflect the institutional legacies, governance challenges, and socio-political contexts specific to post-socialist public administrations. Since HRM reforms in post-socialist European countries are shaped by common historical, institutional, and political factors, restricting the selection to journals from this region allows for a more coherent and contextually relevant analysis. However, we acknowledge the potential limitation of excluding journals from broader geographic regions. The rationale behind this decision was to maintain a focused research framework and ensure comparability of cases. Additionally, all of the selected journals publish articles in English, which allowed for greater accessibility, consistency, and comparability of findings. While this excludes non-English sources, the choice was made to ensure that all analyzed research adhered to common academic standards, facilitating a clear synthesis of the literature. This selection process resulted in four journals being chosen as the primary sources for the analysis of HRM-related themes in post-socialist public administration. The list of the selected journals is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. List of the selected journals.

No	Country of Origin	Journal Title
1	Romania	<i>Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences</i>
2	Poland	<i>NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy</i>
3	Slovenia	<i>Central European Public Administration Review</i>
4	Croatia	<i>Croatian and Comparative Public Administration</i>

Source: Authors.

Following the selection of journals, the next phase involved the systematic identification of relevant scholarly research, ensuring that only methodologically rigorous and thematically relevant articles were included in the analysis. In line with Patton’s (1990, 2002) classification of purposive sampling, this study employed a combination of criterion sampling and theory-based sampling to ensure that only methodologically rigorous and thematically relevant articles were included. Criterion sampling was used to identify studies that explicitly examined HRM reforms, resistance to change, and institutional challenges in public administration within post-socialist European countries. This ensured that each selected article met predefined thematic, methodological, and temporal standards, increasing the reliability and relevance of the analysis. Furthermore, one of the key criteria was the publication period, with the sample restricted to articles published in the last ten years. This timeframe was chosen to ensure that the study reflects current trends and challenges in HRM reforms while maintaining methodological rigor. Additionally, theory-based sampling was applied to ensure that the selected articles contributed to the theoretical development of HRM reforms in post-socialist contexts. To achieve this, an abstract analysis was conducted, followed by an in-depth review of each article’s methodology, findings, and conceptual framework to ensure alignment with the research objectives. The selected studies span different countries (e.g., Slovenia, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Croatia, and Poland), ensuring that HRM reforms are analyzed from multiple perspectives rather than a singular national viewpoint. This approach allowed for structured and systematic selection of studies, thereby ensuring conceptual coherence across

the sample. To further clarify the selection process, Table 2 presents the inclusion criteria applied in identifying and analyzing relevant articles.

Table 2. Inclusion criteria for study selection.

Criterion	Inclusion Criteria	Justification
Study Focus	HRM reforms in public administration	Ensures relevance to the research objective by focusing on HRM policies, reforms, and governance in the public sector.
Geographical Scope	Post-socialist European countries	Targets countries undergoing similar transitions from socialist to market-based public administration systems.
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Guarantees academic rigor and methodological reliability.
Language	Articles published in English	Ensures accessibility and consistency in comparative analysis.
Timeframe	Published within the last 10 years	Ensures relevance to contemporary HRM challenges and reform dynamics.
Thematic Relevance	Studies addressing reform requirements, resistance to change, institutional barriers, or political influences on HRM in public administration	Aligns with the research objective by focusing on critical dimensions of HRM transformation.

Source: authors.

The application of all the outlined criteria and procedures resulted in a final sample of nine articles. The articles selected for analysis in this study, as well as the basic bibliographic data, are listed in Table 3.

Once the selection of articles was completed, a thematic synthesis was conducted to systematically assess key research findings and their relevance to HRM reforms in post-socialist public administrations. Given the scope of the study and the relatively small number of selected articles, the analysis focused on synthesizing recurring themes and identifying shared challenges across different governance contexts.

The first step involved a detailed content review of each selected article, focusing on the key themes related to HRM reforms, including the drivers of reform, the role of institutional constraints, and the impact of political influences on recruitment, performance management, and digital HRM adoption in public administration. The analysis was followed by a flexible thematic categorization, allowing key themes to emerge from the reviewed studies. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying patterns related to bureaucratic inertia, politicization of HRM, digital transformation, performance-based management reforms, and the role of strategic HRM in public administration modernization. In the second step, the identified themes were systematically analyzed across the selected studies to compare findings and assess variations in HRM reform trajectories. The synthesis focused on examining structural and political obstacles that influence the pace and effectiveness of reforms, particularly in relation to bureaucratic inertia, politicization, digitalization, performance-based management, and strategic HRM. Comparative insights were drawn by evaluating how these challenges manifest in different administrative contexts. Finally, in the third step, the extracted insights were synthesized and contextualized within the broader theoretical and policy discussions presented in the Results and Discussion section. The structured approach allowed for a clearer examination of how HRM reforms are addressed across different contexts while maintaining flexibility in interpreting institutional

and policy-related challenges. Additionally, it provided a deeper understanding of the structural and political dynamics affecting public administration.

Table 3. List of analyzed articles.

No	Bibliographic Data	Analyzed Country
1	Biščak, M., & Benčina, J. (2019). The Impact of HRM Practices on the Performance of Municipalities: The Case of Slovenia. <i>Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences</i> , 15(58), 5–23. http://dx.doi.org/10.24193/tras.58E.1	Slovenia
2	Radonić, M., & Milosavljević, M. (2019). Human Resource Practices, Failure Management Approaches and Innovations in Serbian Public Administration. <i>Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences</i> , 15, 77–93. https://doi.org/10.24193/tras.SI2019.5	Serbia
3	Profiroiu, C. M., & Negoită, I. C. (2022). Public Administration Reform in Romania: Assessing the Past and Looking into the Future. <i>Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences</i> , 18, 150–168. https://doi.org/10.24193/tras.SI2022.9	Romania
4	Aburdan, M. M., Săveanu, T. G., Matei, M., & Ujhelyi, M. (2015). Obstacles, Realities and Opportunities in Human Resources Management in Public Administration Institutions from Bihor County (Romania) and Hajdú-Bihar County (Hungary). <i>Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences</i> , 45(45), 5–25.	Romania Hungary
5	Staroňová, K. (2017). Civil-Service Reforms and Communist Legacy: The Case of Slovakia. <i>NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy</i> , 10(1), 177–199. https://doi.org/10.1515/nispa-2017-0008	Slovakia
6	Špalková, D., Špaček, D., & Nemec, J. (2015). Performance Management and Performance Appraisal: Czech Self-Governments. <i>NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy</i> , 8(2), 69–88. https://doi.org/10.1515/nispa-2015-0009	Czech Republic
7	Manojlovic, R. (2017). Strategic Management and Performance Measurement—A Connected or Disconnected Duo? Evidence from Croatian Public Administration. <i>International Public Administration Review</i> , 15(1), 11–31. https://doi.org/10.17573/ipar.2017.1.01	Croatia
8	Barrington, G. (2024). Talent management in the public sector—empirical evidence from the emerging economy of Romania. <i>Central European Public Administration Review</i> , 22(1), 199–220. https://doi.org/10.17573/cepar.2024.1.08	Romania
9	Stančetić, V. (2020). Spoils System Is Not Dead: The Development and Effectiveness of the Merit System in Western Balkans. <i>Croatian and Comparative Public Administration</i> , 20(3), 415–438. https://doi.org/10.31297/hkju.20.3.1	Serbia

Source: authors.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the key findings of the study, organized into thematic areas that highlight the major trends, challenges, and implications of HRM reforms as observed in the analyzed studies on post-socialist public administration.

4.1. HRM Reforms in Post-Socialist Public Administration: Key Trends

The analysis results of this review are organized into two main sections. The first section addresses the theoretical and methodological aspects of the analyzed articles, including the research approach, context, and objectives of each study. The second section summarizes the main findings, implications, and recommendations of the analyzed articles. Table 4 provides a summary of the theoretical and methodological aspects of the analyzed articles.

Table 4. Comparative overview of the theoretical and methodological aspects of the analyzed articles.

Bibliographic Data	Research Approach	Context and Objectives
Biščak and Benčina (2019)	Quantitative research (questionnaire, DEA methodology, principal component analysis, linear regression)	Impact of the HRM practices (quality, job design, job security, individual appraisal, supervisory practices and reward allocation) on organisational performance in Slovenian municipalities
Radonić and Milosavljević (2019)	Quantitative research (questionnaire; reliability test, correlation, multiple regression)	Impact of HRM practices (training and development, promotion, job security, internal communication and job design) on innovation in Serbian central administration
Profiroiu and Negoită (2022)	Qualitative research (document analysis, case study approach)	Public administration reform in Romania, including HRM as a pillar of reform
Abrudan et al. (2015)	Quantitative research (descriptive statistic, national comparison)	Strengths and weakness of HRM practices (motivation, selection and evaluation, professional development, decisional process and trust) in local public administration institutions in Romania and Hungary
Staroňová (2017)	Qualitative research (document analysis, deep interview)	The impact of HRM practices (recruitment, incentive system, civil sector performance) in the context of Slovakia's communist legacy
Špalková et al. (2015)	Qualitative research (document analysis, semi-structured interview)	Performance management in Czech municipalities
Manojlovic (2017)	Quantitative research (semi-structured interview, questionnaire, descriptive statistic)	Link between performance management and strategic management in Croatian public administration
Barrington (2024)	Qualitative research (thematic analysis, semi-structured interview)	Talent management (recruiting, selection, development, employees' responsibilities and performance) in Romania public administration
Stančetić (2020)	Qualitative research (interviews, observations, narrative analysis)	The "spoils system" in the hiring practices of Serbia's public administration

Source: authors.

As noted in Table 4, HRM emerges as a central theoretical theme across the analyzed studies, highlighting its role as a key driver of performance, accountability, and modernization in public administration. However, significant differences exist in how HRM frameworks are conceptualized and applied, reflecting distinct institutional contexts, governance challenges, and methodological orientations. A key distinction is evident between quantitative and qualitative research approaches. These methodological choices significantly shape the scope of their findings and the depth of their insights into institutional challenges.

Quantitative studies focus on measuring the impact of HRM policies on organizational performance, efficiency, and innovation. For example, research on local governance in Croatia and the Czech Republic examines how HRM policies correlate with institutional effectiveness and service delivery. While these studies offer valuable empirical insights, they often overlook the political and institutional constraints that influence reform implementation. In contrast, qualitative studies offer in-depth contextual analyses, exploring how historical legacies, bureaucratic inertia, and political influence shape HRM practices. Research on HRM reforms in Serbia, Slovakia, and Romania demonstrates how entrenched governance traditions and informal political networks continue to shape recruitment, pro-

motion, and performance management practices. Additionally, studies on the “spoils system” in the Western Balkans emphasize the extent to which political influence overrides merit-based hiring, undermining HRM reforms despite formal legal frameworks promoting transparency.

This contrast highlights a key gap in HRM research; while quantitative studies provide measurable indicators but fail to capture informal political and institutional dynamics, qualitative studies diagnose these systemic barriers but lack broader applicability. Despite these methodological differences, both approaches converge on the conclusion that HRM is integral to shaping public administration functionality, particularly in post-socialist transition settings. HRM is not merely a technical mechanism for personnel management but a policy instrument influenced by broader institutional and governance structures, reinforcing the need for greater methodological integration to provide a more comprehensive understanding of HRM reforms in post-socialist public administrations.

Building on the diverse research approaches, methodologies, and conceptual frameworks described in previous sections, Table 5 synthesizes the key findings, implications, and recommendations from the analyzed studies, providing a structured summary of the core themes explored in this research. By consolidating insights from different research perspectives, the table highlights recurring challenges in HRM reform and offers a clearer understanding of the institutional and political factors shaping public administration in post-socialist European countries.

Table 5. Comparative overview of the main findings, implications and recommendations of the analyzed articles.

Bibliographic Data	Main Findings	Implications and Recommendations
Biščak and Benčina (2019)	This study identifies key HRM dimensions that impact Slovenian municipal performance, with supervisory practices positively influencing outcomes, while an excessive focus on quality and job security has a negative effect. These results suggest that achieving optimal performance requires a balanced approach to HRM practice.	The study advocates that local governments adopt a strategic HRM approach that integrates supervisory development and carefully designed context-sensitive practices. This balanced HRM strategy, emphasizing interconnected practices, could enhance organizational performance in public administration.
Radonić and Milosavljević (2019)	HRM practices are significant predictors of innovation in public administration, although their impact varies depending on innovation type. Job design plays a crucial role in fostering innovation. Approaches to failure management moderate the relationship between HRM practices and innovation, where tolerance for failure and failure analysis can either encourage or inhibit innovation.	The research emphasizes the need for a balanced HRM approach that integrates various practices with failure management strategies to create an environment conducive to innovation. The study’s recommendations underline that public organizations should view HRM as a strategic partner in innovation, invest in HRM capacity development, and focus on job design. Additionally, fostering an organizational culture that balances accountability with risk tolerance and learning from failure is essential for promoting sustainable innovation in public administration.

Table 5. Cont.

Bibliographic Data	Main Findings	Implications and Recommendations
Profiroiu and Negoită (2022)	Romania's public administration reform progressed in phases, initially advancing during the EU pre-accession period but losing momentum afterward. Persistent challenges in Romania's public sector include the deprofessionalisation and politicization of the civil service, limited decentralization, public policy inefficiencies, and low levels of digitalization.	The study emphasizes the need for strategic reform in Romania's public administration, particularly through improved HRM practices, such as recruitment, motivation, and evaluation, to foster a professional civil service. In addition, it highlights the importance of enhancing decentralization, optimizing public policy efficiency, and advancing digitalization to create a more effective and citizen-centered administration.
Abrudan et al. (2015)	This study reveals that Romanian and Hungarian employees have similar perceptions of HRM practices, likely due to cultural similarities. Nevertheless, Hungary's public sector aligns more with the New Public Management principles, showing stronger performance evaluations, reward systems, and employee motivation. Both countries need improvements in recruitment, selection, and connecting performance with rewards, with over half of employees reporting autonomy and flexibility in their roles.	This study highlights the need for improved HRM practices in Romania and Hungary's public sectors, focusing on recruitment, selection, performance evaluation, and connecting rewards to performance. It also highlights the importance of fostering an organizational culture that values autonomy, flexibility, and employee participation in decision making to drive more effective and innovative public administration. This suggests that while New Public Management principles are applied differently in each country, enhanced HRM practices are crucial for effective public administration.
Staroňová (2017)	The 2003 HRM reforms in Slovakia, inspired by New Public Management, struggled against communist legacies. Reform elements misaligned with this legacy, such as centralized recruitment and reward coordination, lasted only 5–6 to years, while politically driven discretionary HRM decisions persisted. The communist legacy has hindered professionalization and depoliticisation efforts within the civil service.	This study highlights the persistent impact of the communist legacy as a barrier to civil service reform in Slovakia and explicitly underscores the need for continued civil service reforms. It recommends a strategic, gradual approach to HRM reforms, emphasizing professionalism, training, and a focus on transparency and ethics to overcome resistance and promote depoliticisation.
Špalková et al. (2015)	This study shows the diversity in how local Czech governments implement performance management. Most use tools such as CAF, benchmarking, or ISO standards, but employee evaluation systems are underdeveloped and lack alignment with strategic goals and effective reward links. The key factors enabling implementation are political commitment and project team enthusiasm, whereas the main obstacles include financial limitations and resistance to change.	The study recommends that Czech municipalities improve performance management by creating integrated systems that align their strategic and individual goals. Key suggestions include developing clear action plans, securing political support for reform, investing in employee and manager training to use these systems effectively, and sharing best practices to overcome implementation challenges and strengthen performance evaluation systems.

Table 5. Cont.

Bibliographic Data	Main Findings	Implications and Recommendations
Manojlovic (2017).	This study finds a positive correlation between strategic management advancement and the scope of performance dimensions evaluated in Croatian public organizations. While most organizations primarily measure outputs, other dimensions, such as outcomes, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness, are less frequently evaluated. Local governments lag behind central state organizations in adopting strategic management and comprehensive performance measurements.	This study highlights the need for Croatian public organizations to strengthen strategic management to improve performance measurements. Key recommendations include aligning strategic plans with budgets and individual goals; enhancing measurement systems for outcomes, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness; and using performance data for decision making and continuous improvement.
Barrington (2024).	Talent management in Romania’s public sector remains underdeveloped, with limited understanding among HR practitioners and minimal implementation efforts. Key obstacles include the bureaucratic structure and legacy of the communist regime, underscoring the need for broader institutional and cultural changes to support modern HR practices.	This study suggests that while talent management practices are increasingly adopted in the private sector, their conceptualization and implementation in the public sector differ significantly. This study highlights that talent management in Romania’s public sector faces unique challenges due to bureaucratic structures and the legacy of communism. Effective implementation requires clear conceptualization, adaptation to public sector needs, HR capacity building, and learning from successful international examples.
Stančetić (2020).	Despite the formal introduction of merit-based systems, the “spoils system” remains prevalent across much of the Western Balkans. Political loyalty often outweighs expertise in public sector hiring, particularly during election campaigns. The practice of “secure votes,” where ruling party members secure votes in exchange for public sector jobs, undermines merit principles. Additionally, appointing acting directors in public enterprises serves to bypass open recruitment processes, favoring politically aligned candidates.	The study highlights that the communist legacy and party-driven practices significantly hinder effective merit-based hiring in Western Balkan public administration. Key recommendations include enhancing transparency and expertise-based selection in hiring, limiting political influence in public appointments, establishing independent oversight mechanisms, and fostering the values of professionalism and political neutrality in public service. Comprehensive reforms are suggested to shift focus from party interests to citizen satisfaction.

Source: authors.

While HRM reforms are widely recognized as essential for modernizing public administration, their implementation is often constrained by institutional resistance, political interference, and weak enforcement mechanisms. As illustrated in Table 5, the success of HRM policies remains highly dependent on governance structures and political contexts, which frequently undermine reform objectives.

4.2. Barriers to HRM Reform: Institutional, Political, and Organizational Challenges

One of the primary obstacles to HRM reform is institutional inertia and bureaucratic rigidity. As evidenced by multiple studies, administrative structures frequently delay reform implementation and restrict its practical application. Research findings (Staroňová,

2017; Profiroiu & Negoită, 2022; Stančetić, 2020) indicate that historical legacies and bureaucratic rigidity continue to shape decision-making processes, leading to slow and fragmented HRM reform efforts across post-socialist public administrations. Profiroiu and Negoită (2022) demonstrate that Romania's slow HRM modernization after EU accession was constrained by administrative inertia and weak institutional adaptability.

These findings align with the institutionalist perspective on administrative reforms, which emphasizes the role of historical legacies and deeply embedded bureaucratic routines in shaping policy implementation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Institutional theory suggests that once norms and procedures become entrenched, they create a path-dependent system that resists fundamental change, even in the presence of formal reform efforts. This path dependency explains why bureaucratic structures in post-socialist public administrations remain resistant to new HRM models despite external pressures for modernization (Staroňová & Gajduschek, 2013).

The politicization of public administration is another persistent challenge. Politicization often manifests as political control and influence, utilizing various instruments shaped by administrative traditions and country-specific contexts (Halligan, 2021). Despite the existence of formal depoliticization laws, they are rarely enforced in practice. As a result, party loyalty often overrides merit-based recruitment and promotion. Several analyzed studies highlight that hiring and promotion in the public sector frequently remain discretionary and subject to political influence, undermining professionalism and transparency. In the Western Balkans, the spoils system remains dominant, with political loyalty often outweighing expertise in hiring decisions, despite formal merit-based frameworks (Stančetić, 2020). Similarly, in Slovakia, civil service reforms have struggled to depoliticize HRM, as entrenched political networks continue to shape key administrative appointments (Staroňová, 2017). In Romania, depoliticization efforts lost momentum after EU accession. Political elites maintained control over public administration appointments, prioritizing party loyalty over competence (Profiroiu & Negoită, 2022). Another trend is the use of acting director appointments in public institutions instead of open competition. This strategy allows authorities to circumvent transparency regulations and maintain political control over HRM decisions (Stančetić, 2020). For instance, findings from Stančetić (2020) illustrate how public competitions in the Western Balkans frequently serve a symbolic function, as politically preselected candidates are appointed regardless of formal evaluation procedures. These trends are particularly evident in qualitative research, where case studies provide detailed accounts of how political interference weakens HRM reforms, reinforcing low institutional trust and persistent inefficiencies in the public sector.

This persistent politicization aligns with discussions presented in the theoretical framework, emphasizing how discretionary hiring practices and political patronage continue to undermine the principles of meritocracy and institutional integrity (Staroňová & Gajduschek, 2013; Verheijen, 2001). The analyzed studies further illustrate how political actors leverage administrative positions to maintain influence, thereby restricting the scope for genuine HRM reform. Politicization of public services is not solely a challenge for post-socialist countries but represents a widespread issue in public administration internationally (Halligan, 2021).

Public choice theory challenges the traditional assumption that government and public administration operate solely in the public interest, arguing instead that political actors act strategically to maximize their control over institutions and resources (Dubinsky, 1992; Towfigh & Petersen, 2015). This perspective aligns with the findings of the reviewed studies, which show that HRM reforms aiming to introduce meritocratic principles frequently encounter resistance from entrenched political networks benefiting from discretionary hiring practices. As a result, depoliticization remains a slow and contested process in many

post-socialist public administrations, where institutional inertia and political self-interest continue to shape HRM policies (Peters & Pierre, 2004).

Another key theme in Table 5 is the inconsistent enforcement of meritocratic principles. While merit-based recruitment frameworks are formally in place, their practical implementation is often compromised by political influence, discretionary hiring, and party patronage (Stančetić, 2020). Performance management frameworks, as illustrated in studies by Špalková et al. (2015) and Manojlovic (2017), often lack integration with merit-based career advancement, further weakening the role of HRM as a modernization tool. Without clear performance-based incentives, performance appraisal remains a formalized procedure rather than a driver of administrative efficiency. As Abrudan et al. (2015) demonstrate, in both Romania and Hungary, performance evaluations are often not effectively tied to promotion and reward mechanisms. This misalignment further exacerbates workforce stagnation and limits professional development opportunities. Research on Czech self-governments highlights that while performance appraisal mechanisms are widely acknowledged as beneficial, their implementation often lacks structure and alignment with broader strategic goals (Špalková et al., 2015). In Croatian public organizations, performance evaluations primarily focus on measurable outputs rather than broader effectiveness metrics such as efficiency and cost-effectiveness. This results in a fragmented approach to assessing administrative performance (Manojlovic, 2017). Some municipalities have introduced formal appraisal frameworks, but the link between employee performance and incentives remains weak.

The findings of the reviewed studies align with broader theoretical discussions on the challenges of performance management in public administration, particularly the difficulty of establishing objective metrics and the impact of subjectivity (Zainudin & Othman, 2024; Schnell et al., 2021). Moreover, the influence of political favoritism, identified in the reviewed studies, is consistent with concerns about the erosion of meritocracy in performance assessments (Christensen & Lægneid, 2021).

4.3. Strategic HRM and Digitalization: Opportunities and Limitations

Beyond the previously discussed structural challenges, additional themes emerging from the analyzed studies emphasize the role of HRM digitalization and strategic HRM in modernizing public administration. However, their implementation remains fragmented, with institutional and structural barriers limiting their effectiveness. HRM digitalization has been identified as a promising tool for improving efficiency and transparency in public administration. However, despite formal commitments to digital transformation, studies indicate significant disparities in adoption. Research on Romania's public sector suggests that low levels of digitalization hinder HRM reform effectiveness. Outdated administrative structures prevent the full integration of e-governance tools (Profiroiu & Negoită, 2022). Similarly, findings from Czech municipalities reveal that while digital performance management tools exist, financial constraints and resistance to change limit their widespread adoption (Špalková et al., 2015).

The challenges of digital transformation in public administration are well documented in the literature (Mountasser & Abdellatif, 2023). While some governments are redesigning entire processes rather than merely digitizing documents (Mergel et al., 2019), others struggle with implementation due to limited governmental support, weak inter-agency coordination, budget constraints, ineffective reform strategies (Dunleavy et al., 2006), and a lack of employees' digital skills (Rupp, 2017). These obstacles align with findings on Romania's slow adoption of digital HRM tools and the financial and institutional resistance observed in Czech municipalities. Such disparities highlight that despite the recognized

benefits of digital transformation, structural limitations continue to obstruct meaningful progress in HRM modernization.

Finally, strategic HRM is gaining prominence as a framework for improving HRM reforms, but its integration remains weak. A lack of coordination between HRM policies and broader institutional objectives hampers progress. Evidence from Slovenia suggests that adopting a holistic HRM strategy that incorporates supervisory development and context-sensitive policies can enhance organizational performance. However, such approaches are rarely implemented consistently across post-socialist public administrations (Biščak & Benčina, 2019). Studies on innovation in Serbian public administration highlight that HRM strategies must be linked to broader governance reforms to effectively drive public sector innovation (Radonić & Milosavljević, 2019). While digitalization and strategic HRM have the potential to modernize public administration, their success depends on overcoming structural, financial, and institutional barriers that continue to undermine reform efforts. In addition to structural, financial, and institutional constraints, the effectiveness of strategic HRM remains limited by the absence of clearly defined frameworks and long-term workforce planning. As Barrington (2024) highlights, talent management in Romania's public sector is underdeveloped. HR practitioners often lack a clear understanding of its principles and struggle to integrate it into broader HRM strategies. This misalignment between talent management and institutional objectives reflects broader structural weaknesses, as Barrington (2024) notes that the lack of strategic HRM frameworks leads to workforce stagnation and limited professional development opportunities.

4.4. Implications for Public Sector Governance and Policy Recommendations

The findings presented in Table 5 reinforce the conclusion that HRM reforms are not merely technical adjustments but are deeply embedded within broader governance structures and political cultures. Their success depends not only on overcoming entrenched political interference and strengthening institutional accountability but also on aligning HRM policies with broader public sector reforms. While digitalization offers potential for greater transparency and efficiency, its impact remains limited by institutional resistance and insufficient adaptation. Additionally, the underdevelopment of talent management and strategic HRM further constrains the effectiveness of reform.

To achieve meaningful progress, HRM reforms require a systematic approach that integrates digitalization, strategic workforce planning, and more flexible HRM policies. Successful examples from certain European countries demonstrate that embedding digital solutions and meritocratic principles into HRM frameworks can enhance efficiency and reduce political influence over recruitment (Radonić & Milosavljević, 2019). However, further advancements depend on the ability of institutions to overcome structural resistance and position HRM reforms within broader public administration modernization efforts, rather than treating them as isolated technical adjustments. Thus, the modernization of HRM in post-socialist public administrations must move beyond fragmented initiatives and toward a cohesive, long-term strategy that addresses institutional barriers, strengthens strategic frameworks, and ensures a more consistent approach to digitalization.

Thus, while these strategies provide a roadmap for advancing HRM reforms, their interpretation must be considered in light of the methodological constraints of existing research. The methodological limitations of the analyzed studies highlight key challenges in assessing HRM reforms in post-socialist public administrations. In most quantitative studies, constraints are primarily related to small sample sizes and a narrow focus on specific research factors, limiting the ability to generalize findings across different institutional contexts. On the other hand, qualitative studies provide rich, in-depth insights but are constrained by highly specific research settings, making cross-case comparisons more

difficult. These methodological differences hinder a unified interpretation of results, as quantitative studies identify measurable correlations, while qualitative research highlights structural and institutional barriers to HRM reforms (Staroňová, 2017; Špalková et al., 2015). Furthermore, the lack of longitudinal studies remains a major gap, as most research relies on cross-sectional data, capturing only a snapshot of ongoing reforms without assessing their long-term effects (Radonić & Milosavljević, 2019). Another critical issue is the subjectivity of HRM performance evaluations, as many studies depend on self-reported assessments from employees or managers, which may be biased by social desirability or political influence (Manojlovic, 2017; Stančetić, 2020). These findings underscore the complexity of HRM reforms in post-socialist public administrations and the persistent challenges of balancing institutional constraints, political influences, and modernization efforts. This discussion provides the basis for the concluding section, which reflects on the broader implications of these reforms and outlines directions for future research.

5. Conclusions

This study examined how reform requirements and resistance to change shape HRM reforms in post-socialist European public administrations, as reflected in selected academic studies. The findings indicate that while HRM reforms are formally driven by the need for modernization, professionalization, and EU integration, their practical implementation is often constrained by institutional inertia, political interference, and fragmented enforcement mechanisms. Resistance to change is reflected in entrenched bureaucratic norms, discretionary hiring practices, and a lack of institutional support for performance-based management. These structural and political barriers continue to slow down the transition toward more transparent and meritocratic HRM systems.

A key contribution of this study is its emphasis on the need for a holistic and context-sensitive approach to HRM reforms. While many existing discussions focus on adopting best practices from advanced economies, our analysis highlights the importance of adapting reforms to specific administrative cultures and governance traditions. The study also provides a nuanced perspective on the role of digital transformation in modernizing HRM, showing that while digital tools can enhance transparency and efficiency, their impact remains limited without institutional commitment and strategic alignment.

Beyond its theoretical implications, this study has practical significance for policy-makers and HRM professionals. Strengthening transparent recruitment processes, linking performance management to accountability measures, and integrating digital solutions are crucial steps toward creating a citizen-oriented public administration. Additionally, fostering regional cooperation and knowledge exchange can accelerate reform efforts by providing comparative insights and transferable policy solutions.

Although this study offers a thematically structured review of HRM reforms, its reliance on secondary sources presents limitations in capturing real-time policy dynamics. Additionally, the scope of the analysis is constrained to nine studies from four academic journals, which, although systematically selected, may not fully encompass the breadth of research on HRM reforms in post-socialist public administrations. While this study follows predefined inclusion criteria to ensure methodological rigor and regional comparability, this selection strategy inherently limits its scope to research published in post-socialist European countries. As a result, the study does not claim to provide an exhaustive analysis of all post-socialist countries, nor does it incorporate findings from internationally published journals that may offer broader perspectives on HRM reforms. Future research could expand this scope by integrating a wider range of sources, including international journals, to explore cross-regional perspectives and best practices in public administration reform. Many of the analyzed studies focus on specific aspects of HRM reforms, such as recruitment

and performance management, while other critical areas, such as leadership development, employee motivation, and organizational culture, remain underexplored. This selective focus may limit the comprehensiveness of conclusions regarding the broader transformation of HRM in post-socialist public administrations. Furthermore, the prevalence of qualitative methodologies in existing research provides depth but lacks the longitudinal and large-scale empirical studies needed to quantify the effectiveness of HRM reform.

Future research should prioritize comparative empirical studies to measure the impact of HRM reforms on public sector efficiency and governance quality. Further investigation into how administrative cultures and societal perceptions of meritocracy influence the adoption of HRM is also needed. Finally, exploring the integration of artificial intelligence and automation in HRM processes could offer new insights into the potential of digital transformation to reduce political discretion and improve decision-making transparency in public administration.

Author Contributions: Investigation, A.M.G.; Writing—original draft, B.Z.P.; Writing—review & editing, S.Š.Ž. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Research program from Slovenian Research Agency P5-0027: Prilaganje slovenskega gospodarstva in razvoja identiteta Slovenije v EU.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Abrudan, M. M., Săveanu, T. G., Matei, M., & Ujhelyi, M. (2015). Obstacles, realities and opportunities in human resources management in public administration institutions from Bihor county (Romania) and HajdÚ-Bihar county (Hungary). *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 11(45), 5–25.
- Andrews, R., & van de Walle, S. (2013). New public management and citizens' perceptions of local service efficiency, responsiveness, equity and effectiveness. *Public Management Review*, 15(5), 762–783. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Andelković, J. (2023). Good governance in public administration. *BizInfo (Blace) Journal of Economics, Management and Informatics*, 14(2), 121–126. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Baimenov, A. (2020). About Some of the factors for public administration effectiveness. *Public Administration (Gosudarstvennaja Sluzhba)*, 22(1), 26–32. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Barrington, G. (2024). Talent management in the public sector—empirical evidence from the emerging economy of Romania. *Central European Public Administration Review*, 22(1), 199–220. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Biščak, M., & Benčina, J. (2019). The impact of HRM practices on the performance of municipalities. The case of Slovenia. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 15(58), 5–23. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Boselie, P., Van Harten, J., & Veld, M. (2019). A human resource management review on public management and public administration research: Stop right there. . . before we go any further. . . *Public Management Review*, 23(4), 483–500. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bowman, J. S. (2010). The success of failure: The paradox of performance pay. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 30(1), 70–88. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Brown, K. (2004). Human resource management in the public sector. *Public Management Review*, 6(3), 303–309. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Budurina-Goreacii, C., & Cebotari, S. (2021). Buna guvernare: Definiții, principii, caracteristici și limite în societățile democratice. *Moldoscopie*, 93(2), 21–28. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Burns, J. P. (2022). Human resource management in public administration: Key challenges. In *oxford research encyclopedia of politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 25(8), 652–661. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Capshaw, T. F., & McNeece, C. A. (2000). Empirical studies of civil protection orders in intimate violence: A review of the literature. *Crisis Intervention and Time-Limited Treatment*, 6(2), 151–167. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Castelo, S. L., & Gomes, C. F. (2024). The role of performance measurement and management systems in changing public organizations: An exploratory study. *Public Money & Management*, 44(5), 399–406. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Christensen, T., & Læg Reid, P. (2021). Performance management: Experiences and challenges. In *Handbook of Public Administration* (pp. 210–222). Routledge.
- Ciuhu, A. M., & Vasile, V. (2019). Conceptual development of human capital. *Annales Universitatis Apulensis: Series Oeconomica*, 21(1), 49–56. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Coccia, M., & Igor, B. (2018). Rewards in public administration: A proposed classification. *Journal of Social and Administrative Sciences*, 5(2), 68–80.
- Coman, R., & Volintiru, C. (2021). Anti-liberal ideas and institutional change in Central and Eastern Europe. *European Politics and Society*, 24(1), 5–21. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Crozier, M. (1964). *The bureaucratic phenomenon*. University of Chicago Press.
- Dan, S. (2015). The new public management is not that bad after all: Evidence from Estonia, Hungary, and Romania. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 44(1), 25–40.
- Daniel, L. T. O. (2023). Human resources professionalism in public administration: Efforts to achieve good governance and organizational performance improvement in the era of bureaucratic reform. *KnE Social Sciences*, 8(17), 615–627. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- De Waele, L., Polzer, T., Van Witteloostuijn, A., & Berghman, L. (2021). “A little bit of everything?” Conceptualising performance measurement in hybrid public sector organisations through a literature review. *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting & Financial Management*, 33(3), 343–363. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Demo, G., Costa, A. C. R., & Coura, K. V. (2024). HRM practices in the public service: A measurement model. *RAUSP Management Journal*, 59(1), 50–66. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 147–160. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Došenović, D., & Zolak Poljašević, B. (2022). The impact of the size of the organization on the design of human resource management activities. In R. Celec (Ed.), *Challenges of modern society from different perspectives—New issues* (pp. 27–44). Verlag Dr. Kovač.
- Drechsler, W., & Randma-Liiv, T. (2014). The new public management then and now: Lessons from the transition in Central and Eastern Europe. In *Working papers in technology governance and economic dynamics* (p. 57). The Other Canon Foundation & Tallinn University of Technology.
- Dubinsky, W. (1992). Law and public choice: A critical introduction. *Michigan Law Review*, 90(6), 1512–1519. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Dujmović, J. (2021). *Specifičnosti upravljanja ljudskim potencijalima u javnim službama* [Doctoral dissertation, The Polytechnic of Rijeka].
- Dunleavy, P., Margetts, H., Bastow, S., & Tinkler, J. (2006). New public management is dead—Long live digital-era governance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 16(3), 467–494. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Gardner, M. E., & Palmer, G. (1997). *Employment relations: Industrial relations and human resource management in Australia* (2nd ed.). Macmillan.
- Garengo, P., & Sardi, A. (2021). Performance measurement and management in the public sector: State of the art and research opportunities. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 70(7), 1629–1654. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Giaque, D., Anderfuhren-Biget, S., & Varone, F. (2013). HRM practices, intrinsic motivators, and organizational performance in the public sector. *Public Personnel Management*, 42(2), 123–150. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Gogalis, T. (2021, May 7–8). *The role of human property administration in quality management in the public sector* [Conference session]. International Conference on Business and Economics-Hellenic Open University, Athens, Greece. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Greenan, N., Lanfranchi, J., l’Horty, Y., Narcy, M., & Pierné, G. (2019). Do competitive examinations promote diversity in civil service? *Public Administration Review*, 79(3), 370–382. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Hall, B. A., Keeney, A. J., Engstrom, D. W., & Brazzel, P. (2021). Confronting the traditional system: A qualitative study on the challenges to school based restorative practices policy implementation. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 24(3), 361–383. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Halligan, J. (2021). *Politicization of public services in comparative perspective*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Hennessy, A., Choulis, I., & Siakas, G. (2024). Merit recruitment, professional advancement opportunities, and prosocial rule-breaking among public servants in Greece. *Socio-Economic Review*, 1–22. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Hubbell, L., & Kreci, V. (2019). The importance of introducing a merit-based hiring system in North Macedonian governments. *SEEU Review*, 14(2), 122–134. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Ishiyama, J. (2000). Candidate recruitment, party organisation and the communist successor parties: The cases of the. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 52(5), 875–896. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Jambrač, J. (2021). An approach to performance measurement and comparison of public administrations. *Hrvatska i Komparativna Javna Uprava: Časopis za Teoriju i Praksu Javne Uprave*, 21(1), 155–180. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kazantseva, D. B. (2022). Socio-philosophical analysis of the spiritual and moral potential of the individual. *Humanitarian: Actual problems of the humanities and education*, 22(1), 38–51. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Konateh, H., Duramany-Lakkoh, E. K., & Udeh, E. (2023). Cost and administrative effectiveness of recruitment and selection practices on public service delivery in public sector institutions. *European Journal of Business and Management Research*, 8(2), 21–30. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kopecký, P., & Spirova, M. (2011). ‘Jobs for the boys’? Patterns of party patronage in post-communist europe. *West European Politics*, 34(5), 897–921. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Koprić, I. (2009). Decentralizacija i dobro upravljanje gradovima. *Hrvatska i Komparativna Javna Uprava: Časopis za Teoriju i Praksu Javne Uprave*, 9(1), 69–77.
- Kotková Štřiteská, M., & Sein, Y. Y. (2021). Performance driven culture in the public sector: The case of Nordic countries. *Administrative Sciences*, 11(1), 4. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kwaku Ohemeng, F. L. (2014). Challenges and prospects of public administration education and training in Africa: The case of Ghana. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 20(4), 469–486. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lapsley, I. (2009). New public management: The cruellest invention of the human spirit? *Abacus*, 45(1), 1–21. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lapiente, V., & van de Walle, S. (2020). The effects of new public management on the quality of public services. *Governance*, 33(3), 461–475. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Latkovskiy, P. P. (2020). *Public administration and its role in civil society*. Publishing House “Baltija Publishing”. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lewis, D. (2007). Testing pendleton’s premise: Do political appointees make worse bureaucrats? *The Journal of Politics*, 69, 1073–1088. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Liff, R. (2014). Unintended consequences of NPM drive the “bureaucracy”. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 37(8), 474–483. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Mahmoud, M., & Othman, R. (2021). New public management in the developing countries: Effects and implications on human resource management. *Journal of Governance and Integrity*, 4(2), 73–87. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Manliev, G. (2021). Evolution in public governance models: From administrative management to the hybrid and normative concept of good governance (part I). *Ikonomiceski i Sotsialni Alternativi*, (4), 106–124. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Manojlovic, R. (2017). Strategic management and performance measurement—A connected or disconnected duo? Evidences from Croatian public administration. *International Public Administration Review*, 15, 11. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Marcinkowski, L., Butnaru, A., & Rabrenović, A. (2024). *Salary systems in public administration and their reforms: Guidance for SIGMA partners*. OECD Publishing. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Marčetić, G. (2008). Pojmovnik, Hrvatska i komparativna javna uprava. *Časopis za Teoriju i Praksu Javne Uprave*, 8(2), 539–544.
- Mergel, I., Edelman, N., & Haug, N. (2019). Defining digital transformation: Results from expert interviews. *Government Information Quarterly*, 36(4), 101385. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Micheli, P., & Pavlov, A. (2020). What is performance measurement for? Multiple uses of performance information within organizations. *Public Administration*, 98(1), 29–45. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Mojić, D., & Jovančević, J. (2020). Explaining unsuccessful public administration reforms in postsocialist Serbia: The neoinstitutional perspective. *Lex Localis—Journal of Local Self-Government*, 18(2), 293–310. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Mountasser, T., & Abdellatif, M. (2023). Digital transformation in public administration: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Professional Business Review*, 8(10), e02372. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Nešković, S. (2023). Transformation of public administration of serbia and e-government according to the European Union model. *Nauka i Tehnologija*, 11(1), 78–87. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- O’Dwyer, C. (2004). Runaway state building: How political parties shape states in postcommunist eastern europe. *World Politics*, 56, 520–553. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- OECD. (1997). *Public service training in OECD countries*. OECD Publishing. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- OECD. (2021). *Public employment and management 2021: The future of the public service*. OECD Publishing. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Osie Bonsu, C. (2024). The effects of bureaucracy on organizational performance. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies and Innovative Research*, 12(2), 1795–1802.
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42, 533–544. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Pavlović, D. (2022). How to approach state capture in post-communist Europe. A new research agenda. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 31, 960–978. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Peters, B. G., & Pierre, J. (2004). *Politicization of the civil service in comparative perspective. The quest for control*. Routledge.
- Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2011). *Public management reform: A comparative analysis—New public management, governance, and the neo-weberian state* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Profiroiu, C. M., & Negoită, I. C. (2022). Public administration reform in Romania: Assessing the past and looking into the future. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 18(SI), 150–168. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Proskura, M. A., & Torgunakova, A. V. (2021). The motivation of young professionals to enter the civil service. *Humanities and Social Sciences. Bulletin of the Financial University*, 11(3), 115–121. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Radonić, M., & Milosavljević, M. (2019). Human resource practices, failure management approaches and innovations in Serbian public administration. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 15(SI), 77–93. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Rees, C., & Hossain, F. (2013). *Public sector reform in developing and transitional countries: Decentralisation and local governance*. Routledge. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Reina, R., & Scarozza, D. (2021). Human resource management in the public administration. In *Organizational development in public administration: The Italian way* (pp. 61–101). Palgrave Macmillan. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Rivera, J. D. (2016). Accessing disaster recovery resource information: Reliance on social capital in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. In M. Companion, & M. Chaiken (Eds.), *Responses to disasters and climate change: Understanding vulnerability and fostering resilience* (pp. 61–70). CRC Press.
- Rivera, J. D. (2018). When attaining the best sample is out of reach: Nonprobability alternatives when engaging in public administration research. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 25(3), 314–342. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Rupp, C. (2017). *E-Government in Europa—Warum es in österreich gut funktioniert*. Institut für den öffentlichen Sektor.
- Schnell, S., Miheş, D., Sobjak, A., & van Acker, W. (2021). *Performance management in the public administration: Seven success factors*. World Bank.
- Schroeder, R. (1992). *Max weber and the sociology of culture*. SAGE Publications.
- Selznick, P. (1957). *Leadership in administration: A sociological interpretation*. Harper & Row.
- Shashyna, M., Gudź, P., Pankova, A., Benchak, O., & Nemyrovska, O. (2023). Modernization of public administration in Eastern Europe in the context of implementation of digitalization. *Eastern-European Journal of Enterprise Technologies*, 4(13), 57–65. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Shim, D. S. (2001). Recent human resources developments in OECD member countries. *Public Personnel Management*, 30(3), 323–348. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Shiri, R., El-Metwally, A., Sallinen, M., Pöyry, M., Härmä, M., & Toppinen-Tanner, S. (2023). The role of continuing professional training or development in maintaining current employment: A systematic review. *Healthcare*, 11(21), 2900. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Stančetić, V. (2020). Spoils system is not dead: The development and effectiveness of the merit system in western Balkans. *Hrvatska i Komparativna Javna Uprava: Časopis za Teoriju i Praksu Javne Uprave*, 20(3), 415–438. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Staroňová, K. (2017). Civil-service reforms and communist legacy: The case of Slovakia. *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*, 10(1), 177–199. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Staroňová, K., & Gajdusček, G. (2013). Civil service reform in Slovakia and Hungary: The road to professionalisation? In *Civil servants and politics: A delicate balance* (pp. 123–151). Palgrave Macmillan UK. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Stevulak, C., & Brown, M. P. (2011). Activating public sector ethics in transitional societies: The promise of integrity. *Public Integrity*, 13(2), 97–112. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Stroiňska, E. (2020). New public management as a tool for changes in public administration. *Journal of Intercultural Management*, 12(4), 1–28. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Suri, H. (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 11(2), 63–75. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Sušjan, A. (1996). The hardening of the budget constraint in post-socialist economies: The case of Slovenia. *Acta Oeconomica*, 48(3–4), 393–414.
- Šimac, N. (2002). Izbor i početna izobrazba viših kadrova državne uprave: Francuska iskustva-tranzicijske mogućnosti. *Hrvatska i Komparativna Javna Uprava: Časopis za Teoriju i Praksu Javne Uprave*, 4(2), 343–386.
- Špalková, D., Špaček, D., & Nemec, J. (2015). Performance management and performance appraisal: Czech self-governments. *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy*, 8, 69–88. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Teisman, G., & van Buuren, A. (2007). Implementing NPM: A complexity perspective on public management reform trajectories. In *New public management in Europe: Adaptation and alternatives* (pp. 181–195). Palgrave Macmillan UK. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Terman, J. (2014). Evaluating Political Signals: The nature of bureaucratic response in minority preference purchasing. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 44(5), 522–549. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Thill, K., Venegas, B. C., & Poór, J. (2016). HR Positioning—A matter of national culture? facts from hungary. *Business Perspectives and Research*, 4(2), 136–144. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Torfin, J., Bøgh Andersen, L., Greve, C., & Klausen, K. K. (2020). Bureaucracy. In *Public governance paradigms* (pp. 24–36). Edward Elgar Publishing. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Towfigh, E. V., & Petersen, N. (2015). Public and social choice theory. In *Economic methods for lawyers* (pp. 121–145). Edward Elgar Publishing. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Van de Walle, S., & Hammerschmid, G. (2011). The impact of the new public management: Challenges for coordination and cohesion in European public sectors. *Administrative Culture/Halduskultuur*, 12(2), 190–209.
- Verbeeten, F. H., & Speklé, R. F. (2015). Management control, results-oriented culture and public sector performance: Empirical evidence on new public management. *Organization Studies*, 36(7), 953–978. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Verheijen, T. (2001). *Politico-administrative relations. Who rules?* Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Administration in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Vignieri, V. (2018). Performance management in the public sector. *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*, 74, 1–8. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Vitanski, D. (2019). The concept for equal opportunities for employment, affirmative measures and “positive discrimination” in the public administration. *KNOWLEDGE-International Journal*, 31(1), 345–350. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Wegner, T. (2013). *Applied business statistics: Methods and excel-based applications* (3rd ed.). Juta and Company Ltd.
- White, G., & Drunker, J. (2016). *Reward management. Global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance*. Springer International Publishing. [[CrossRef](#)]
- World Bank Group. (2018). *Improving public sector performance: Through innovation and inter-agency coordination*. World Bank.
- Zainudin, H., & Othman, N. (2024). Navigating change: The journey of performance management in the public sector. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(8), 465–477. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Zolak Poljašević, B. (2011). Profesionalizacija javne uprave: Implikacije na ključne aktivnosti menadžmenta ljudskih resursa. *Banja Luka: Moderna Uprava*, 5–6, 145–161.
- Zolak Poljašević, B., & Berber, N. (2024). From theory to practice: Incentives for managers and professionals. *Naše gospodarstvo/Our Economy*, 70(1), 13–23. [[CrossRef](#)]

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.