Website Scoring Protocol — Dimension 5: Citizen Participation (Items 81–100)

The instrument is a scientifically validated measure, previously tested in Romanian public administration: the Holzer and Kim adaptation developed by Stoica and Ilaș (2009). It is not a set of criteria constructed ad hoc for the present study. It was applied and scored by a single evaluator (Nicoleta Loghin Dumitriu) between 15 February and 15 March 2025. The twenty items are renumbered 1–20 for clarity; the original number in the full instrument (81–100) is given in parentheses for each item and is the number used in the raw database (Supplementary Material S1).

Because scoring was carried out by a single coder, no inter-coder reliability coefficient could be computed. Consistency therefore rests on the pre-established and previously validated character of the scoring rules rather than on a statistical reliability test: every scoring decision follows a criterion fixed in the instrument before the evaluation began.

Scoring scales: 17 of the 20 items use a 0–3 scale (0 = facility absent; 1 = basic level; 2 = intermediate level; 3 = full implementation, or the number of sub-features present, according to each item). Two items (4 and 5, orig. 84 and 85) are binary (0–1). One item (6, orig. 86) uses a 0–2 scale. One item (19, orig. 99) is defined in the source instrument only at the two extremes (0 and 3), with no criterion for intermediate values; it was treated as a binary item on the 0–3 scale. The maximum raw score for the twenty items is 55 points, as stated in Section 3.2 of the manuscript.

Raw subdimension scores are converted to the balanced metric used in the article by multiplying each subdimension total by ten divided by its raw maximum (information ×1.429, consultation ×0.556, deliberation ×0.667, decision ×3.333, monitoring ×0.833), as specified in Section 3.3 of the manuscript. Each subdimension is thereby expressed on a common 0–10 range and contributes an equal maximum of 10 points to a standardized total of 50. Because each factor is a positive constant, the transformation is strictly monotone and leaves all rank-based subdimension-level statistics unchanged.

Grouping by subdimension (following Table 1 of the manuscript): Information (items 3–6, orig. 83–86, raw max. 7), Consultation (items 1–2, 12–13, 15–16, orig. 81–82, 92–93, 95–96, raw max. 18), Deliberation (items 7–11, orig. 87–91, raw max. 15), Decision (item 17, orig. 97, raw max. 3), Monitoring (items 14, 18–20, orig. 94, 98–100, raw max. 12). The renumbering (1–20 = original item − 80) is the one used throughout the article and in the raw database (Supplementary Material S1).

Translation note: the wording below renders the Romanian adaptation of the instrument (Stoica and Ilaș 2009) into English; it is not a verbatim reproduction of the original English phrasing of Holzer and Kim.

1. Information

Item (orig. no.)	Question / measure	Scoring levels
3 (orig. 83) 0–3	Does the website offer a newsletter or a bulletin of community news?	0 = No. 1 = The website has a newsletter/bulletin in html format. 2 = The newsletter/bulletin can be downloaded (.doc or .pdf). 3 = The newsletter/bulletin is distributed by e-mail.
4 (orig. 84) 0–1 (binary)	Is it possible to subscribe to a newsletter or to a listserv (mailing list)?	0 = No. 1 = Subscription is possible.
5 (orig. 85) 0–1 (binary)	Is there an option to unsubscribe from the newsletter or the listserv?	0 = No. 1 = An unsubscribe option is available.
6 (orig. 86) 0–2	Does the website have an online bulletin board or chat capabilities for gathering citizen input on public issues? (“Online bulletin board” or “chat capabilities” means that any citizen	0 = No. 1 = An online bulletin board / chat capability exists. 2 = In addition, it can be searched by author or by keyword.

Item (orig. no.)	Question / measure	Scoring levels
	may post ideas, comments or opinions without a discussion topic being imposed.)	

2. Consultation

Item (orig. no.)	Question / measure	Scoring levels
1 (orig. 81) 0–3	Does the website allow users to comment or provide feedback to departments/agencies through online forms?	0 = No. 1 = Departments/agencies display telephone or fax numbers for comments. 2 = Departments/agencies provide an e-mail address (mailto) for comments. 3 = Some departments allow comments to be submitted through online forms.
2 (orig. 82) 0–3	Does the website allow users to send comments or provide feedback to elected officials (e.g. the mayor or local councillors)?	0 = No. 1 = The e-mail address of the mayor or of the local council is displayed. 2 = Both the mayor's address and that of the local council are displayed. 3 = In addition, the website allows comments to be submitted through online forms.
12 (orig. 92) 0–3	Does the website offer online opinion polls on particular issues?	0 = No. 1 = Online opinion polls on particular issues are available. 2 = In addition, the results of previous polls are displayed. 3 = The website shows the results of the current poll in real time.
13 (orig. 93) 0–3	Number of online opinion polls in the past year (offline polls are excluded).	0 = None. 1 = One in the past year. 2 = Two in the past year. 3 = Three or more in the past year.
15 (orig. 95) 0–3	Does the website allow users to access citizen satisfaction surveys online?	0 = No. 1 = The website provides contact information for participation. 2 = The questionnaire can be downloaded and returned by fax or telephone. 3 = The questionnaire can be completed online.
16 (orig. 96) 0–3	Are the results of the citizen satisfaction survey published on the website?	0 = No. 1 = The website provides contact information for obtaining the results. 2 = The results can be downloaded from the website.

Item (orig. no.)	Question / measure	Scoring levels
		3 = The results are available in an accessible database.

3. Deliberation

Item (orig. no.)	Question / measure	Scoring levels
7 (orig. 87) 0–3	Does the website provide an online forum for the discussion of public policy issues? (An "online forum" is a web page on which local authorities invite public consultation on public policy issues and citizens take part in discussions on those specific topics.)	0 = No. 1 = There is no online forum, but a note provides an e-mail address, fax or telephone number to which opinions may be sent. 2 = The website has an online discussion forum. 3 = In addition, the topics of previous discussions and their outcomes are displayed.
8 (orig. 88) 0–3 (1 point per factor)	Participants in the online forum (1 point for each factor, maximum 3).	+1 point: participation of public officials in the discussions. +1 point: participation of experts on the issue (their opinions displayed or their participation in discussions). +1 point: presence of a moderator on the forum.
9 (orig. 89) 0–3 (1 point per factor)	Format of the online forum (1 point for each factor, maximum 3).	+1 point: e-mail notification of new messages. +1 point: a summary of the discussion is provided at regular intervals (daily, weekly or monthly). +1 point: citizens may propose discussion topics.
10 (orig. 90) 0–3	Does the website have scheduled e-meetings? ("E-meetings" are real-time discussions held at a predetermined moment, in synchronous form, so that participants can exchange opinions simultaneously.)	0 = No. 1 = Scheduled e-meetings for discussions among citizens exist. 2 = Scheduled e-meetings for discussions between citizens and public officials exist. 3 = In addition, the topics and outcomes of previous e-meetings are posted.
11 (orig. 91) 0–3	Number of online discussion forums or e-meetings in the previous year (including scheduled ones).	0 = None. 1 = Only one in the past year. 2 = Two in the past year. 3 = Three or more in the past year.

4. Decision

Item (orig. no.)	Question / measure	Scoring levels
17 (orig. 97) 0–3 (number of categories)	Does the website provide tools for online decision-making (e-petitions, e-juries or e-referenda)? Note — e-petition: a formal request addressed to the local council or to a	0 = No category. 1 = One of the categories. 2 = Two of the categories. 3 = Three categories.

Item (orig. no.)	Question / measure	Scoring levels
	government agency, signed online by a number of citizens, raising an issue of concern. Note — electronic citizens' juries: a group of citizen representatives who examine evidence on an issue, deliberate online and recommend conclusions to the local administration. Note — e-referendum: questions that the entire population is called upon to answer online (e.g. a change in a public policy).	

5. Monitoring

Item (orig. no.)	Question / measure	Scoring levels
14 (orig. 94) 0–3	Does the website provide live video broadcasts of public events?	0 = No. 1 = The website provides recordings of public events. 2 = The website provides live video broadcasts. 3 = In addition, a mechanism allows users to submit comments or to ask questions.
18 (orig. 98) 0–3	Are performance indicators published on the website? ("Performance indicators" refers to outcomes, efficiency, effectiveness or other sets of indicators by which the attainment of administrative goals is assessed.)	0 = No. 1 = The indicators are listed on the website in html format. 2 = The indicators can be downloaded from the website (.doc or .pdf). 3 = The indicators are available in an accessible database.
19* (orig. 99) 0 or 3 only	Does the city have a general performance measurement system published on its web page?	0 = No. 3 = The city has a performance measurement system covering all departments. Coder note: the source instrument defines only the two ends of the scale for this item; there is no criterion for 1 or 2. The item was scored 0/3 and functions as a binary item on a 0–3 scale, not as a four-level item.
20 (orig. 100) 0–3	Are the results of performance measurement published on the website?	0 = No. 1 = The website provides contact information for obtaining the results. 2 = The results can be downloaded from the website. 3 = The results are available in an online accessible database.

6. Examples of ambiguous coding decisions

The instrument used (the Holzer and Kim adaptation developed by Stoica and Ilaș, 2009) is a scientifically validated instrument, previously tested in Romanian public administration, and not a set of criteria constructed ad hoc for this study.

The correspondence between website items and Facebook indicators, together with their scoring criteria, was moreover established in full before the evaluation began (a stage reflected in Sections 1–5 above). For these two reasons, applying the protocol to each evaluated website did not, in practice, raise case-by-case difficulties of interpretation: every decision followed a rule fixed in advance and validated through the instrument, not a judgement improvised during coding.

The examples below therefore do not illustrate hesitations on the part of the evaluator, but the types of situation that the wording of the instrument, as reproduced in Sections 1–5 above, anticipates and resolves explicitly through its own scoring rules. They allow a second coder or an external reader to see exactly how the protocol applies in cases that might at first sight appear ambiguous.

Item	Source of ambiguity	Rule in the protocol	Coding decision applied
4 (orig. 84)	Nominal versus functional existence of a facility.	"0 = No. 1 = Subscription to a newsletter or to a listserv is possible."	The item asks whether the subscription option exists, not whether the mechanism works flawlessly at the moment of evaluation. Where a subscription link or form was present on the website but temporarily inactive, a score of 1 was assigned, reflecting declared existence in accordance with the literal wording of the item, with the operational status recorded separately in the observations column for transparency. The same distinction (declared existence versus verified functioning) was applied consistently to item 5 (orig. 85), which is worded identically.
7 (orig. 87)	Selection of a single level on the scale, rather than summation of partially met conditions.	"0 = No. 1 = There is no online forum, but a note provides an e-mail address, fax or telephone number to which opinions may be sent. 2 = The website has an online discussion forum. 3 = In addition, the topics of previous discussions and their outcomes are displayed."	For 0–3 items of the "cumulative levels of implementation" type, the protocol requires the selection of a SINGLE level, namely the most advanced level whose conditions are fully met, and not the sum of several partially met levels. Example: if the website has an online forum but does not publish the history of previous discussions, level 2 is assigned and the boxes for the other levels are left blank. The same rule was applied to all items with cumulative levels of implementation: items 1, 2, 3, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18 and 20 on the 0–3 scale, and item 6 on the 0–2 scale. Items constructed as counts (11, 13, 17) follow the same single-level logic, although their criterion is quantitative rather than cumulative.
8–9 (orig. 88–89)	Composite item scored by factors: the ambiguity	Item 8: "+1 point: participation of public officials in the discussions; +1	Unlike items with cumulative levels (previous row), here the score IS summed,

Item	Source of ambiguity	Rule in the protocol	Coding decision applied
	concerns the verification of the individual condition, not the scoring rule.	point: participation of experts on the issue; +1 point: presence of a moderator on the forum." Item 9: "+1 point: e-mail notification of new messages; +1 point: periodic summary of the discussion; +1 point: possibility for citizens to propose discussion topics."	one point for each condition met independently, up to a maximum of 3. The practical ambiguity does not concern the scoring rule, which is explicit and additive, but the verification on the website of each individual condition (for instance, whether a person posting is an "expert on the issue" or merely an informed citizen). The decision was documented explicitly, with the source (page/section of the website) recorded in the observations column.
19* (orig. 99)	Item with an incomplete scale: only the ends of the scale are defined.	"0 = No. 3 = The city has a performance measurement system covering all departments." — with no explicit criterion for levels 1 or 2.	The source instrument (Stoica and Ilaș 2009) does not define intermediate levels for this item. The coding decision applied treated the item as binary (0/3) on a scale formally labelled 0–3, without improvising criteria for 1 or 2. This solution is consistent with the general principle of the protocol: no extrapolation beyond the explicit wording of the instrument.