

Platform Power and the Geopolitical Order: Greece 2.0 as a Tech Colony

Charis Papaevangelou (University of Toulouse)

Eugenia Siapera (University College Dublin)

Historical Materialism
Athens, Greece

22 April 2023



1. Introduction

RQ: What can we learn from Big Tech investments in Greece about platform power?

2. Theoretical Framework

Platform Power

- **Infiltrates** state & political power
- **Creates** dependencies
- **Imposes** platform logics
- **Becomes embedded** in governance & the social fabric

(Poell et al., 2022; van Dijck et al., 2019)

Data Colonialism

- **Frames** platform power as a form of colonialism
- **Highlights** the data extractivist practices
- **Combines** colonialism, capitalism & neoliberalism

(Couldry & Mejias, 2019, 2021)

Geopolitical & Economic Order

- **Emphasises** the political economy of platforms' infrastructural investments
- **Enquires** into broader power structures & relationships between countries
- **Sheds light on** the underlying dependencies of periphery on core/Western countries

(Gray, 2021; Velkova & Plantin, 2023)

3. Case Study: Greece 2.0 & Big Tech

Research Context

- Greece's long & complex history of colonisation and dependency on core Western countries
- Greece's financial collapse & severe austerity measures between 2009-2018
- Neoliberal governmental policies & digitisation of the state
- Covid-19, NextGenerationEU & Greece 2.0

Case Study

- Greece's National Recovery and Resilience Plan: Greece 2.0
- Microsoft's GR for Growth Project (2020)
- Amazon Web Services (AWS) Pilot Project: Turning Naxos into a Smart Island

Methods

- Discourse analysis of government & tech companies' communication material
- Document analysis of legal & policy texts

3. Case Study: Greece 2.0 & Big Tech

Greece 2.0

- €30.5 billion in grants & loans from the NextGenerationEU recovery package
 - €1.3 billion for the digital transformation of the public sector
 - €300 million for the digitalisation of SMEs
 - €500 million for the digital transformation of the education and health system
 - €750 million for digital upskilling

Microsoft GR For Growth

- 3 data centres in Attiki, Greece by 2025
 - Qualified for the privileged ‘Strategic Investment’ legal framework
 - €976 million investment, 300 new jobs in 10 years
- Cloud services, legal advices & Microsoft products for businesses & the public sector
- Digital literacy programs for 100,000 employees
- AI for Cultural Heritage: Ancient Olympia

AWS: Naxos Smart Island

- Designed by a consortium of 20 Greek & int’l companies, and supported by the Greek govt, local authorities & the US embassy
 - Cloud-powered services for health, tourism, transportation, resource management
 - Digital literacy
- Follows a series of agreements:
 - MoU with Min. of Digital Governance in 2020 for the “Digital Transformation of Greece”
 - MoU with Min. of Development for a “Regional Space Hub” in 2021
 - Awarded 2 contracts to support Greece’s Covid-19 cloud services in 2020, 2021
 - AWS Local Zone in Greece (€200 million)
 - Opened offices in Athens in 2021 / Launched other cloud services

4. Preliminary Findings

Dependencies

- Economic
- Infrastructural
- Governmental
- Geopolitical
- Lock-in effects

Transformation

- Greece is framed as a technological laggard & in deficit compared to core EU/Western countries
- Foreign investments – primarily US capital – are presented as the solution (creation of jobs, upskilling, connection to the “information highways” of powerful economies)
- Regulatory facilitations (e.g., fast-track processes)

Colonialism

- Extractivist practices from core socioeconomic & health-related exchanges of individuals
- Occupation of territories and space
- Deterioration of environment & local landscapes
- Appropriation of public resources & funds
- Strengthening of neoliberal governance (governance *through* platforms)

“In addition, and in the context of “the Smart Island” project in Naxos, we are conducting a training programme to upgrade digital skills by training 100 people over 65 years old. And this is something I like as an idea. In general, the project for Naxos is not just about creating a “smart island” to upgrade the way the port facilities or waste management work. It's about changing people's mindset and their approach to technology. **This is about the transformation of people themselves.**”

Tanuja Randery (AWS, Managing Director EMEA)


Smart Island: How the AWS Cloud is powering social, economic, and environmental improvements in Greece

by Cameron Brooks | on 05 OCT 2022 | in [Announcements](#), [Europe](#), [Government](#), [Internet Of Things](#), [Public Sector](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments](#) | [Share](#)



Microsoft will accelerate digitization of the public sector and businesses with access to local cloud services and skill a minimum of 100,000 people in Greece in digital technologies

“The digital future of SMEs in Greece starts today, here. With Microsoft and the Gr For Growth program and the European Union's funded programs through the Recovery and Resilience Fund, the time has come for SMEs to start their digitalization journey.”



GR for Growth

Υποδομές

Άνθρωποι

Επιχειρήσεις

Κοινωνία

Βιωσιμότητα

Ψηφιακά Εργαλεία MME

30 Χρόνια


Όλη η Microsoft

Gr
for
growth

Το ψηφιακό μέλλον των
Μικρομεσαίων Επιχειρήσεων

Ελλάδα 2.0

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΣΧΕΔΙΟ ΑΝΑΚΑΜΨΗΣ
ΚΑΙ ΑΝΕΚΤΙΚΟΤΗΤΑΣ



Works Cited (Indicative!)

- Couldry, N., & Meijas, U. A. (2019). *The costs of connection: How data is colonizing human life and appropriating it for capitalism*. Stanford University Press.
- Gray, J. E. (2021). The geopolitics of 'platforms': The TikTok challenge. *Internet Policy Review*, 10(2).
<https://doi.org/10.14763/2021.2.1557>
- Poell, T., Nieborg, D. B., & Duffy, B. E. (2022). *Platforms and cultural production*. Polity Press.
- van Dijck, J., Nieborg, D. B., & Poell, T. (2019). Reframing platform power. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(2).
<https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.2.1414>
- Velkova, J., & Plantin, J.-C. (2023). Data centers and the infrastructural temporalities of digital media: An introduction. *New Media & Society*, 25(2), 273–286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221149945>

THANK YOU!

Charis Papaevangelou (University of Toulouse) -
@charispapaev / charilaos.Papaevangelou@univ-tlse3.fr

Eugenia Siapera (University College Dublin) -
@eugeniasiapera / eugenia.siapera@ucd.ie

