

From disruption to domination: trajectories and geographies of platformization

Gernot Grabher | HafenCity University Hamburg

Koen Frenken | Utrecht University

Mark Graham | University of Oxford

Martin Kenney | University of California Davis

Platforms rule. Any doubt on this verdict is habitually dispelled with a brief reference to the fact that the most valuable technology corporations - Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft - are all platform businesses. While the dominance of platforms appears beyond doubt, the conceptualization of platforms is rather contested. The phenomenon evades classic categorizations as it transgresses established governance modes, organizational templates, sectoral boundaries and legal frameworks: rather than adhering to a single architecture, platforms proliferate as diverse, ephemeral and polymorphous forms (Schüßler et al. 2021); they strategically deploy ‘conjectural geographies’ (Graham 2020) of material embeddedness and digital disembeddedness.

Platforms have been conceived as (multi-sided) *markets* that perform a quintessential market function as match-makers between autonomous actors (Hagiu and Wright 2017); at the same time, however, powerful network effects create winner-takes-all markets (Kenney et al. 2021): monopolies are a celebrated feature, not an unfortunate failure (Grabher and König 2020). Alternatively, platforms have been studied through the analytical lens of *hierarchies* whose managerial capacity to control labor and assets resembles corporate domination (Frenken and Fuenfschilling 2020); and yet, excessive domination, paradoxically, undermines the all-important dynamics of network effects when complementors are reluctant to join over-exploitative platforms (Grabher and van Tuijl 2020). Finally, viewed through the third classical governance perspective, platforms as innovation ecosystems seem to forge collaborative *networks* in order to reap supply-side economies; however, rather than on trust built through repeated interaction, exchange relations are based on instant reputation scores; and rather than through mutual loyalty, ties solidify through strategic lock-in (Stark and Pais 2020).

Instead of studying platforms as pristine category, this session seeks to elucidate trajectories and geographies of platformization as contested re-combination of various governance modes and elements (Poell et al. 2019). Potential topics might include, but are not limited to:

- The polymorphous character of platforms: re-combinations of markets, hierarchies networks
- Trajectories of platformization: vertical, horizontal and cross-sectoral encroachment of industries
- Limits to platform expansion: the role of domain knowledge and materiality in confining network effects
- Algorithmic management of platforms: centralized power, decentralized control
- Conjectural geographies of platforms: the strategic operation between material embeddedness and digital disembeddedness
- Variations of platform governance: platform strategies in different national and urban jurisdictions
- Leveraging platform power: the complicity of platform owners and consumers in curbing regulation
- Limiting platform power: strategies of policy-makers and civil society actors to resist and regulate platforms
- Platform urbanism: the platformization of urban infrastructures and urban everyday-life.

References

- Frenken K and Fuenfschilling L (2020) The Rise of Online Platforms and the Triumph of the Corporation. *Sociologica* 14(3): 101-113. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11715>.
- Grabher G and König J (2020) Disruption, Embedded. A Polanyian Framing of the Platform Economy. *Sociologica*, 14(1): 95–118. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/10443>.
- Grabher G and van Tuijl E (2020) Uber-Production. From Global Networks to Digital Platforms. *Environment and Planning A* 52(5): 1005–1016. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X20916507>.
- Graham M (2020) Regulate, replicate, and resist – the conjunctural geographies of platform urbanism. *Urban Geography* 41(3): 453-457, <https://doi:10.1080/02723638.2020.1717028>.
- Hagiu A and Wright J (2015) Multi-Sided Platforms. *International Journal of Industrial Organization* 43: 162-174. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijindorg.2015.03.003>.
- Kenney M, Bearson D and Zysman J (2021) The platform economy matures: measuring pervasiveness and exploring power. *Socio-Economic Review* 19(4): 1451–1483. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwab014>.
- Poell T, Nieborg D and van Dijck J (2019) Concepts of the Digital Society: Platformisation. *Internet Policy Review* 8(4). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1425>.
- Rietveld J, Schilling M and Bellavitis C (2019) Platform strategy: managing ecosystem value through selective promotion of complements. *Organization Science* 30(6): 1232–1251. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2019.1290>.
- Schüßler E, Attwood-Charles W, Kirchner S and Schor J (2021) Between Mutuality, Autonomy and Domination: Rethinking Digital Platforms as Contested Relational Structures. *Socio-Economic Review* 19(4): 1217–1243. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwab038>.
- Stark D and Pais I (2020) Algorithmic Management in the Platform Economy. *Sociologica* 14(3): 47-72. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/12221>.