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THE RELATION BETWEEN NEW TECHNOLOGIES
AND POWER IN GREECE:
PERCEPTIONS OF PEOPLE IN POSITIONS OF POWER

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to delve into the question of whether and how the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are channels through which many forms of power are being exercised. The analysis will be based on the findings drawn from interviews with persons having been appointed in powerful positions in the Greek public administration and under this role have contributed to the ICTs usage as well as, secondary written sources on public administration. The main elements of this analysis include an examination of a. the nature of power, b. the subjects in positions of power within public administration as are defined within the framework of this paper, c. the ideologies of modernisation and globalisation as vehicles to the changes incurred regarding the ICTs, and finally d. the transmission of the aforementioned to wider society.

Keywords: *e-governance, ICTs, information society, Greece*

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, societies, are being fundamentally changed by the emergence of a new technological paradigm based on ICTs (microprocessors, computers, telecommunications, optoelectronics, net). However technology per se, as is well documented, does not determine social processes and

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institutions. It is only a mediating factor in a complex matrix of interaction between social structures, social actors and their socially constructed tools, where technology is pertained (Castells, 1999, 2006). The so called Information Society has raised a number of questions, which remain unsolved or unanswered particularly as far as e-government or e-governance are concerned, whose operation is an essential component of the communication process between citizens and state.

These new trends have a multi-faceted impact in Greece at different levels. During the past few decades, Greek society has undergone significant social changes triggered by external factors such as globalization and various phases of European integration. These transformations demand, among other things, recording, transmission and exchange of information and data from the public authorities towards the citizens and vice versa. New technologies are now at the disposal of the State due to the process of modernization that it went through. The recent social and economic events triggered by the economic crisis have further accelerated this process, giving communication and state-citizen affairs innovative characteristics within a society in which orality holds a central role. Orality in terms of verbal communication has predominated social exchanges in the country in the past. The “intervention” by the modernization process affects the business environment as well as relations among citizens and public administration. This is a turning point largely due to the introduction of ICTs within the public administration’s operation and running as well as in the every-day life of citizen.

New technologies have penetrated everyday lives of Greeks; one out of two citizens uses a personal computer, a definitely increasing trend because in five years, from 2009 to 2013, the use of PCs has increased by 35,1%, and internet access by 54,8%. If we examine data spanning a decade, the use of PCs from 2002 to 2013 has increased from 24,1% to 60,4% and the access to the internet from 14,7% in 2002 to 59,9% in 2013 respectively¹.

1. 2002 is the first year that the Research of Information Technology and Communication Use was undertaken by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (EL.STAT.) in households with members from 16-74 years old; a research that continues up to the present day. An internet user, in the context of ICT statistics, is defined as a person making use of the internet in whatever way: whether at home, at work or from anywhere else; whether for private or professional purposes, regardless of the device or type of connection used. Regular internet users are those who have used the internet at least once a week within a three-month reference period according to Europe in figures - Eurostat yearbook downloaded from http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_in_figures_-_Eurostat_yearbook. In figure 2, we present a self-

Evidence show that over the last decade the use of ICTs and particularly, the Internet, constitutes a tool to achieve better governance and interactive communication between citizens and public administration in Greece in order to meet currently implemented international standards. As OECD underlines «e-government initiatives refocus attention on a number of issues: how to improve the efficiency of internal government consultation, communication and decision making; how to collaborate more effectively across ministries, agencies and other entities of the public administration to address shared problems; how to enhance customer focus; how to build relationships with private sector partners» (OECD, 2011).

There is an interesting index, the so called e-government index that depicts data regarding citizens and the state and more specifically provides a measurement of the interconnection of public services, communication and the completion of transactions through the internet. According to that index one in two internet users, from April 2012 - March 2012, used the internet to find information on the public services' websites, to get hold of applications, certificates, etc, or to send out paperwork like tax return forms. At the same time the percentage of electronic transactions of citizens with public bodies services for personal use showed an upward trend, with an increase of 45% in relation to the respective percentage depicted two years ago (April 2009 - March 2010). Also, according to international indexes,²

assessment approach based on Eurostat data, where the respondent indicates whether he/she has carried out specific tasks related to computer use, without these skills being assessed, tested or actually observed. According to Eurostat description, six computer-related items were used to group the respondents into levels of computer skills in 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2012: copy or move a file or folder; use copy and paste tools to duplicate or move information within a document; use basic arithmetic formula (add, subtract, multiply, divide) in a spreadsheet; compress files; connect and install new devices, e.g. a printer or a modem; write a computer program using a specialised programming language. The levels of basic computer skills are low, medium and high level as follows: High level of basic computer skills: Individuals who have carried out 5 or 6 of the 6 computer-related. Medium level of basic computer skills: Individuals who have carried out 3 or 4 of the 6 computer-related items. In figure 2 we present only individuals who have carried out 1 or 2 of the 6 computer-related items, namely acquiring low level of basic computer skills :<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc460>

2. E-Government Development Index 2012 (UN): 37th place among 193 countries, 41st place in 2010. In Digital Completion of 20 services towards businesses and citizens (Online Sophistication Index 2011), Greece's average is 70% compared to 90% which is the European average. Regarding the Full Online availability in basic public services (Full Online Availability 2010), Greece presents a figure of 48% while for the EU it is 82%, which means that Greece is last among the -EU-27, as well as, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and Croatia.

it appears that steady improvement is monitored Greece, though the country is steadily behind the EU-27 countries that shows a steady increase of individuals using the internet for interaction with public authorities, during the period 2008-2012 (see Annex, figure 4).

Concerning internet interaction with public authorities, data indicates a constant increase in Greece. The percentage becomes higher between 2012 and 2014 due to the country's obligations related to the reforms required by Troika in order to meet the goals set by the successive economic adjustment programs. Nevertheless, Greece is situated below the average of the EU-27 countries for all years under examination (see Annex, Figure 4).

Moreover, citizens in Greece are also increasingly using internet in order to access information on e-government activities via websites³. Regarding this data the percentage of Greek citizens using government websites in comparison to other EU countries is even lower (see Annex, figure 4). A possible explanation may lay in the fact that the aforementioned table depicts the cases of countries, where citizens' responsibilities towards the government are fulfilled online through websites. As satisfaction on the use of e-government websites is concerned for the same period (2008-2014), a relatively low percentage is depicted regarding Greek citizens (see Annex, figure 5).

New technologies through their penetration are introduced as a new force, a new form of power that affects social life in practical ways. Ways that are "logical", that are meaningful, that bear a certain mark (Tzivakou, 2003), because all societies draw their prevailing principles from their social meaning. Power, also, chooses the optimal type of technology for its exertion based on the same notion of social meaning. Through the chosen technology, power feeds back the data it drew from social meaning, so as to fulfill its goals.

The objective of this paper is the delineation of the relationship between communication technology and technology in general and power as it is manifested in public administration. The material comes from qualitative research carried-out between 2007-2011.⁴ The goal of the qualitative research was to track several aspects of Information Society and the penetration of ICTs in public administration. The semi directed interviews'

3. These data concern only information gathered on the websites and do not concern interaction or transactions with public authorities.

4. Kondyli, D. (2012). *Les prolongements productives «de l'agir communicationnel»: le cas de la Grèce*, Paris; Université Paris 8, doctoral thesis, (unpublished).

goal was to draw information relative to the sector to which informants had close ties with, in order that several aspects of ICTs and different correlations of power/authority would become apparent during the research. More specifically, the research material that we are going to use in this paper is based on fifteen semi directed interviews with people who had been appointed in vital political and administrative positions in public administration in Greece and especially involved in information society or e-governance activities therefore influencing the procedures because of their position. This group of informants has a high level knowledge on the information society sector in Greece because of the relevance of their professional occupation. Mostly male, aged 40-57, were chosen because of their successful careers in positions of power, through which, they have gained experience and definite views on public administration. That which characterized them was their position as high ranking executives in public administration in addition to representatives of the academic community with multiple attributes - professional research experience on ICTs and careers in political positions of public administration. In the midst of the current socio-economic conjuncture, this material was re-assessed from scratch subject to new criteria and three more informants were chosen. They were executives of public administration in crucial ministries that participated in work groups with Troika representatives regarding issues on reforms and developments in their area of competence. The three informants with whom we conversed during 2014 were 2 women and 1 man, aged 40-47. We posed specific questions regarding the reconstruction logic of e-government services amidst the economic crisis.

By analyzing the information provided of the informants, we will attempt to outline the relationship between Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and power as it is formed in public administration. We delve into those words with a twofold goal: first, to find out the views of people in positions of power, regarding these new technologies and secondly to find ways through which the political power use the new technologies.

ICTS AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Through the thematic analysis of the interview material of the informants, three topics appeared to show up in the new technologies discourse of people in positions of power. All the informants connect the use of new technologies in public administration with the modernization of the state.

At the same time, however they consider the structural weaknesses of the state to be responsible for the delayed integration process of new technologies in state mechanisms and they refer to their various uses by the political power. More specifically:

ICTs and the modernization process

ICTs according to informants discourse serve the state's modernization. Their penetration in public administration, as they mentioned is directly connected to the development of information services towards citizens and later to the development of the transactions mechanism. Although they noted that the rate of such adoption depended on European funding and that modernization of public administration through integration of ICTs was established gradually. During the 1980's, when the first attempts were undertaken, informants underlined that outcomes were rather weak. The data provided by the informants is verified juxtaposition with written documents that provide evidence on that period. What is depicted at these sources is that in 1981, when the country became a member of the European Community, technological know-how and to a certain extent imported hardware were accessed via the European partner-countries. It is, also, highlighted that a decade later Greece had jumped on the bandwagon of the technological revolution⁵ with high growth rates and investment in education, a considerable high rate of technologically highly – skilled human capital in the labor market as well as high rates of mobile communications products' consumption (Koutrakou, 2007; Voulgaris, 2003, p. 16).

Informants reported that aspects of information society are encountered mainly in the domain of communication and exchange. In their opinion, the development of information society is connected to- and somehow restrained- by the mobile phone industry, to the needs of oral communication and subsequently to the social networks and clientelism in a broader sense. As an example, they point out the difficulty of users –patients to access the computerized services of EOPYY (National Organization for the Provision of Health Services) once in place. They argue that even in the case of searching for a doctor or a professional to consult, the family or the

5. Voulgaris Y. (2003), *Greece, Europe, United States, Globalisation. The challenge of hegemony*, Athens, Polis 16 {Γ. Βούλγαρης, Ελλάδα, Ευρώπη, Η.Π.Α., Παγκοσμιοποίηση. Η πρόκληση της ηγεμονίας. Αθήνα: Πόλις}. In the introduction of the book, the author compares Greece to a passenger travelling by train although as a passenger of the last wagon because s/ he arrives late and jumps on at the latest moment.

extended social networks will constitute the initial source of information. They underline that productive relationships are rather organised around personal ties and communication than standardization procedures.

Informants have, also, spoken about the expansion of ICTs in the public administration during the 1990's and early 2000's, with the help of operational programs like "Kleisthenis". Then, public administration was provided with PCs and the websites of the ministries were developed, with emphasis on the Departments of Ministries that were involved with economic transactions. Legislative acts were voted during 2000-2004, as they noted, while Ministries and public sector organizations enriched their content and posted online briefing material in Greek and English. The Ministry of Finances (and the taxing services), KEP (Citizen Service Centers), information departments of Ministry of the Interior⁶ and several departments of public administration accelerated the modernization process of their provided services. The picture provided by informants is, also, completed by the data provided at an OECD's report. According to this report, the creation of citizens' one-stop shops (KEPs) has been an important achievement because it has been evaluated as a step for the ministries to focus on policy whilst public service provision will be provided by decentralized services and local government (OECD, 2012, p. 25) OECD stretch out that TPOIKA has restricted to revenue and expenditure data. The report underlines also that it would be helpful if Troika referenced the need for an administration with strengthened capacities to support broader data management (idem, p. 26)

Informants argued that in 2004 and for about 2 years, the modernization rates of information/communication systems and of citizen service systems slowed down with the exception of the Finance Ministry services. In March 2004, after the national elections and the New Democracy political party in government under the Prime Minister K. Karamanlis, several websites were modified or became obsolete. Thus, relevant information was no more accessible. Websites have been restructured either partly or wholly following a familiar practice of similar changes occurring after transformations in the political sphere in Greece. Informants considered that the change of political party in the government underlined a rupture of a rather symbolic than actual nature.⁷ They noticed that in 2007 when

6. Currently, Ministry of Interior and Administrative Reconstruction.

7. Sotiropoulos D., *The remains of authoritarianism: Bureaucracy and Civil Society in post-authoritarian Greece* in Cemoti, n° 20-Medias d'Iran et d'Asie centrale (en ligne), URL : <http://cemoti.revues.org/document188.html>. accessed on 16/4/2006. The political phenom-

funding programs resumed, modernization process started again. It is important to note that the informants have underlined that the departments of public sector that showed the greatest standardization of procedures are the economic services and the navy sector. The informants put emphasis on the fact that in the first Medium Term Adjustment Programme under the constant pressure of external monitoring mechanisms, use of ICTs in all aspects of public administration was accelerated and completed in order for the country to obtain the payment of successive tranches of a EUR 110 billion financial assistance package. Thus, because of external obligations and commitments, the urgent need of systematic recording of state activities have arisen, which enforced the widespread use of ICT in public administration⁸. Under the pressure of external sources, the country entered a new phase of modernization “assisted” by new technologies. Interviewees concluded that in the current state of affairs, the main motive for the integration of new technologies in public administration was the increased effectiveness of control mechanisms and revenue raising mechanisms, and indirectly, better communication of the administration with the citizens in order to achieve the aforementioned goals.

The relative importance of support services in the central administration is associated with inadequate ICT systems and the dispersion of many ministries’ services among dozens of sites. ICT applications and e-governance within the public administration are still too limited to deliver their full potential. The current state of ministries’ ICT infrastructure does not facilitate information sharing and collaborative work between ministries. An OECD report confirms the aforementioned statements by the informants. According to this report it has been observed, for instance, that civil servants working on business licensing issues within a region do not have access to the same database regarding businesses operating in their area

enon of clientelism has a negative impact on the administrative reforms: see (Lyrintzis, 1978, 2005; C. Featherstone, 2005), Opinion of the economic and social Committee of European Union in Greece upon request by the Ministry of the Interior, concerning the «Operational program: improvement of the administrative performance of the public administration», URL: www.oke.gr/gnomes/gnomes%202006/155.doc, accessed on 6/6/2009.

8. E-government was institutionalized in Greece with the legislative act 3979/16/6/2011. “For the electronic government and other provisions with the purpose of a) recognizing the right of all individuals and legal entities of private sector to communicate and complete transactions with the departments of public sector using information and communication technology (ICT) and b) the regulation of the use of ICT from the departments of public sector for the needs of their operation and the support of their transactions and responsibilities”.

(OECD, 2009h). OECD experts, also, indicated that the root cause for the shallow development of IT infrastructures in the central administration is the lack of interoperability between ministries' systems and the absence of a common vision of knowledge and data sharing across the government.

Informants also emphasized that the public administration's interface with external users, as well as the uptake of e-government services, remain still limited. OECD's data show that the percentage of citizens using the Internet to interact with public authorities was close to 12% in 2010, one of the lowest rates among OECD member countries. Moreover, these data indicates that the uptake by businesses is higher – and close to the OECD average, but it decreased between 2005 and 2010 (OECD, 2009c). Thus, OECD experts state that the early e-government initiatives oriented towards businesses were successful, but need to be deepened. Informants referred to another good practice of e-governance in this regard, which is the setup of an electronic business register (the General Commercial Registry, GEMI). GEMI is used as a platform for the digitalization and the automation of corporate registration procedures working as one-stop shop services for business start-ups. They underlined the fact that, GEMI constitutes a good practice being a joint initiative of several ministries⁹. OECD experts' views diverge. In an assessment conducted in 2009, the OECD estimated that GEMI was not yet ready to become operational because of the disparities between the chambers' digitalized registers (OECD, 2009h). In addition, this report states that the government portal ERMIS is planned to provide from a central point all available information to citizens and enterprises with regard to all their transactions with the public administration (natural or electronic), as well as selected electronic transactions.

Informants referred to two important initiatives being also underway that enhance public consultation and improve the transparency of public decisions. Since, October 2009, the Prime Minister's Office has been implementing the "Open Government" project, which consists in making all draft regulations (laws, presidential decrees, ministerial decisions, etc) available online on a central government website for public consultation. The consultation process is open for a period of at least ten days, during which everyone (citizens, trade unions, NGOs, etc) can submit comments and objec-

9. Joint- decision of the Ministries of Interior Affairs, Decentralization & e-Governance, Ministry of Finance, Competitiveness and Maritime, Ministry of Economy, Labor and Social Insurance, Health and Social Solidarity, as well as Justice, Transparency and Human Rights, law 3853/2010. It is about a network of almost 60 chambers and 1800 notaries working as one-stop shop services.

tions. All results of the consultation are assessed by competent authorities and feedback into the regulation drafting process. Informants state that the program called “Diavgeia” (“Clarity”) is also mentioned as a good practice as well. It is under the co-ordination of the Ministry of Administrative Reform and E-Governance. It operates under a new law (Law 3 861/2010) that mandates the online publication of all decisions from the central government, local government and public administration bodies, including commitment of funds and financial decisions. Informants underlined that any administrative decision cannot be applicable until this requirement is fulfilled. They evaluated positively the free access to all *Government Gazette* issues and the transparency of information provided by public organizations on their portals (publication of specific pieces of information in a normative form). However, empirical evidence provided by OECD shows that the online information can be inaccurate or out of date (OECD, 2011).

According to the informants, ICT contributes to the current modernization because it allows the political authorities to monitor the “flow of money”. *“The Big Bang takes place in the Finance Ministry in 2011”*, as an informant mentioned, *“under the pressure of Troika to monitor the flow of money and electronic commerce. The executives and especially the IT personnel had to go through an extremely stressful period and it’s up to the people in charge to inspire that vision”*. However the key informants involved in the specific domain note that more e-government services provided for external users are needed. As an example, the government portal ERMIS was the starting point for creating a shared ICT infrastructure and back-office system across different services of the public sector, in order to improve sharing of information, reduce duplication and administrative burdens, and enable businesses to transact electronically with government. Nevertheless, they pointed out that the development of e-government services took many years. Periods of intense activity have been alternated with periods that are characterized by stagnation due to political will.

Subsequently, our informants, with their references on the role in modernization that new technologies «initiate» in public administration, inform us that new technologies are used in order to accommodate old-archetypical functions of authority, such as control and monitoring. Only this time, these old functions are covered by a new shell, that of new technologies. The functions of the state attempt to change, to adapt, they put on a new shell in order to best respond to the current challenges. So, our informants reveal that the adoption of new technologies from power, commensurate with the adoption of new means to exert old forms of power. The findings

based on the interviews carried out until the beginning of 2011 assume that informatics had not been generally perceived as a big priority for the country. They mentioned two domains of the public sector which mark a considerable standardization of informatization, which are the taxes sector/services and the shipping activities/sector. The explication concerning the slow informatization process has also to do with the relationships among involved actors, namely public administration and citizens as consumers¹⁰. They refer to good practices such as open government, an initiative which attempted to deal with clientelist practices. On the contrary, information provided by the second group of informants in 2014 notes that computerization process has considerably intensified during the current economic crisis. The reasons for which the country presents deficiencies with regard to the propagation of ICTs are societal, economic and cultural.

STRUCTURAL WEAKNESSES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

There are structural weaknesses of public administration posing impediments to the integration of new technologies in its mechanisms, as informants stated.

They referred to the informatization process in Greece, while linking solely its development to the corresponding EU Operational Program that was limited to the implementation of IT projects. They underlined that the state's strategy/policies resulted in an unavailability to meet the objectives of the initial planning because of lack of adequate infrastructures. Therefore, the absorption of funds, (around 12%) was very low during the period 2000-2004. They stated that transfers of funds towards other EU programs, revisions and adjustments were undertaken aiming at reducing the loss of funds related to an EU binding rule and increasing the absorption's rate.¹¹ More specifically concerning productivity, informants

10. Many researchers of e-governance in the 2000's emphasized the customer-orientation public agencies that means delivery of services (Layne and Lee, 2001; OECD, 2003 in Bekkers V. and Homburg V., 2007). In the 1993 Report of the USA government "information technology can create the government of the future, the electronic government. Electronic government overcomes the barriers of time and distance to perform the government business and give people public information and services when and where they want them". Now the approach has focused on the interaction between stakeholders (citizens, business enterprises, civil society etc.) and governments (Fontaine, 2001, 2008).

11. EU Regulation N + 2 requires that the absorption of EU funds must be made within two years following the payment of capital.

think that because of a certain number of public administration's insufficiencies, the e-governance's impact was restrained. More specifically they mentioned, lack of coherent planning and of supporting policy measures, regarding the expansion of Greek enterprises to global markets, as well as deficiency of adequate and appropriate infrastructure and technologies, among other things.

The informants noted that despite the existence and validity of a legislative framework harmonized with the European model, the spread of ICTs in public administration has been slow due to structural problems like design contingency and application issues, bureaucratic problems, lack of digital infrastructure, dependence on European funding, etc. The example of bureaucracy is especially illustrative according to their view. Citizens and in particular business enterprises were always asked to undertake complex and time consuming activities as far as public administration was concerned. Thus, in most cases until 2000-2005 a direct/face-to-face communication was necessary in order for citizens and business enterprises to deal with public administration concerning their cases. Bureaucratic operations prevented citizens to build on trust with public institutions and especially fostered cases of corruption. Business enterprises, also, deal with a complicate administration system regarding the running of their business from the start up to the full operation and beyond. The aforementioned can be strongly connected to the relative lack of planning on the part of public administration. They require standardized content and data documentation for each activity. Insufficient design, planning and poor coordination among public institutions or departments was quite regular until recently. Furthermore, since 2011 the constant pursuing of money, revenues and the need to cut-off public expenditures, in addition to a reduction in the number of civil servants created a strong pressure on the staff in charge of immediate implementation and application. Due to these structural problems, the informants noted that the implementation of ICTs is, also, quite weak in private businesses sector. There are multiple reasons: absence of supporting policies to the operation of businesses, in addition to the small size of businesses that contrasts to the complex computerization and standardization process that public administration demands and so on.

Public sector has been a par excellence employer of IT business enterprises during the 1990's and 2000's through the operation of programs based on European funding. This situation engendered a kind of triangle of interdependence among public administration, business enterprises in general and IT companies in particular. This relationship became prob-

lematic mainly due to the following reasons: the public sector was looking for services and projects, although, their content was not entirely clear or explicit to meet managerial needs. At the same time since funding mechanisms were available they ordered software and hardware systems which could not be further updated or repaired or adjusted after the end of funding. However, there was availability of technical –material infrastructure – since through EU programs the public administration during the last fifteen years has been equipped with PCs, software for the use of e-protocol and of course e-mail's use as a median of communication among public institutions and interested parties. Traditionally, the process of public service provision to the citizen has been mainly paper-based and often supported by face-to-face contact. Therefore, considerable efforts needed to be undertaken to increase user confidence with regard to interaction with state institutions in order for public administration to standardize the process which will, eventually, contribute in strengthening and build trust among citizens and the state.

Moreover, informants underlined that information technology around the globe constantly increases due to the accumulation of huge amounts of data or due to the need of organizing remote and impersonal communication. However, large amounts of data and flow of data to be collected on a systematic basis and to be comparative with others was not possible until now in this country. Informants note in particular the scarcity of data regarding the public administration's operation, as well as, of relevant reliable assessments. They, also, consider that another critical factor regarding the persistence of structural problems was the absence of services provides and of personnel (public servants) on a permanent basis. Greek state and general public administration have been asked to document and systematize the required changes and reforms recommended by Troika and the EU stability mechanism in order to receive financial loans for the implementation of the economic restructuring program¹². These structural problems have also affected the role that IT and telecommunication businesses had to play in the penetration of new technologies, because of their dependence on the public sector (until recently the main client), and on European funding sources and because of their small size.

12. Many sources list the first bailout was €110bn followed by the second on €130bn. IMF has promised to pay Greece for the years in 2015-16, the total amount of bailout funds sums up to €245.6bn. All IMF amounts are used to finance budget deficits and the ongoing refinancing of maturing public debt. Many fundamental changes have occurred in the public and subsequently in the private sector's operation as a prerequisite for the country's recovery economic program.

By noting the structural weaknesses of the state which restricts the extended use of ICT in public administration, the informants imply that within public administration several power groups operate and exert their own form of power, a power of resistance, at a time when the need of modernization appears to be mandatory in order to extend the life of the state. Penetration of new technologies in public administration is promoted by power, but also impinges against authorities.

The political will and lobbying interests enter to the discourse of highly positioned civil servants, when they argue that knowledge, expertise and conceptual design were in place although not applicable in certain cases. In fact, when informants map the structural problems of public administration in relation to the development of information society as well as e-governance they refer to the management of public administration. This finding concurs with researchers, whose scientific expertise is on e-governance, who argue that eventually the operation and efficiency of e-governance is strongly related to the public administration operation in general (Yilidiz, 2007, p. 657). In other words, technology constitutes a means to further enhance efficiency, accountability and better functions of public administration in order to better perform provision of its services and relationships within public organizations, citizens, business enterprises, and institutions of the society as a whole.

USE OF ICTs BY POLITICAL AUTHORITIES

In the interviews that we analyzed, we located procedures, through, which ICTs are utilized by the state. These are four ways relating to the stances of the political power that be and the adoption of new technologies: a) simple absorption combined with indifference and planning weaknesses, b) long incubation period along with neglect and weak design c) discontinuity of political options, and d) use for surveillance and control. In particular:

Sole absorption of funds

Standardization of public administration procedures is strongly connected to computerization problems and IT systems. During the last period, public administration has encountered great difficulties in the absorption of European funds to implement IT projects. The process of absorption of European funds was revealed to be a difficult task for several reasons. One reason is related to the increasing complexity of EU bureaucracy along

with the short deadlines, public administration can have for design and submission of proposals to be funded. Additionally, given that dependence of planning on the EU finding directives resulted in the implementation of IT projects within public administration that are connected only to European funds' specifications. It was, also, stressed that there is a capacity limitation concerning the number of civil servants that can actually meet the design needs and proposal writing within such tight deadlines. As informants stated in several cases managers of high qualifications and appointed to political positions within public sector organizations, tried to understand the factors contributing to the weak rate of absorption and looked into the possible measures that should be taken in order to achieve better quality and efficiency of e-governance policies for the benefit of citizens. One of these attempts was the formation of an IT committee of experts, in the frame of the e-governance strategic axes covering the period 2006-2013. The committee collaborated with organizations and IT enterprises in order to highlight issues related to the integration and application of technology at national level. One of the committee's objective was, also, to look into international experience of the technologically-driven countries in Asian and EU countries. The examination consisted of studying best practices rather than the possibility of adopting tailor made solutions transferred from different socio cultural context –as it has been the case, in the past for many policies implemented in Greece.

As informants stated, ICTs in the Greek public administration are connected to large European funding programs and frameworks and is mainly focused on equipment and in projects of pure computer science. "It is now time to realize that the rise of Information Society and ICT does not respond to what was originally predicted by the state that is to facilitate citizens in their everyday activities. The State's stance results in a failure to respond to the original design and therefore results in low absorption of European funding". Informants underlined that there are some exceptions to the rule. They referred to two examples of e-governance services. The first is TAXIS system concerning income, derived taxes, transactions and correspondence among state service and citizens that is full digitalized. The second is the network SYZEFXIS, a project implemented by the Ministry of Interior Affairs, Public Administration & Decentralization aiming at the development and updating of public sector's telecommunications infrastructures.¹³

13. It is a central node addressed to the public agencies in order to meet communication

Data provides evidence that ICTs and its expansion is one of the ways political power and public administration use can absorb European funds. Absorption, though, does not necessarily correspond to the design capabilities of services in the interest of Greek citizens. As informants implied absorption seems to be the main concern regarding implementation of information society in public administration. Thus, e-governance services provided to citizens and stakeholders reflected the aforementioned voids. However, modifications have occurred during the current socio-economic conjecture due to restriction of funds focusing and reforms undertaken in order for the public administration and the state in general to deal with pervious structural lacunae.

Long incubation

Despite the external modernization that is reflected in the operation of public bodies, the legislation on internal and external communication through new technologies is not being implemented. There seems to be a large portion of public bodies that refuses to facilitate the communication and operation through ICT. Informants have mentioned the legislation of digital signature in 2004. Though, they tried to convince the staff to get rid of stamps and move on the electronic signature, resistance has been manifested. Universal application began its application during the second medium-term program specifically within the field of e-commerce. The use of digital signature and the standardization of information and communication in general, presuppose trust relationship towards the institutions concerned and furthermore, a feeling of responsibility. Therefore, the country is forced to face delay in modernization because of external factors. The informants, also, mentioned another example of electronic services, that of standardization of commissions and open public procurements. Despite the fact that the law for public sector purchasing departments was initiated in 2010, it has not yet been implemented¹⁴. In addition, Informants mentioned Health, a sector that is crucially important for the public and place of interactions among public administrations, citizens and enterprises to a great extent of a highly technological expertise.

needs such as telephone communications among them, data (internet etc), as well as audiovisual equipment (teleconferences, professional training) <http://www.syzefxis.gov.gr>

14. Its implementation began in August 4282/2014 with mandatory implementation from October 2014. This example proves the informants point as far as sufficient legislation and the important delay in implementing that legislation is concerned.

They noted that the integration of standardization procedures was slow in Health, as well. A factor that plays an important role in the long incubation period of ICT is the lack of mechanisms that support their use and implementation. The hardware itself is not enough when its proper service and upgrade is not secured. The financial crisis in Greece accelerated the need for changes and implementation of digital procedures, when finance cuts became the main goal of public administration. The informants also note that the country is forced to face delays in modernization under the pressure of external sources. Nevertheless in order for any change to establish itself, the relationship of public administration with the citizens, the businesses and organizations will need to be improved.

The process of effective spread, use and development of ICT in public administration like the informants described it, is long and painful. It can therefore be argued that a strong correlation exists between structural weaknesses of the public administration and long incubation of ICTs as already has been stated.

Discontinuities

On several occasions, informants took up initiatives to broaden the more effective use of ICTs, mainly those of the connection with the services towards citizens. The standardization and systematic recording that ICT can potentially ensure is being denied, “undermined”, called off, because it was dependent, to a large extent, on the personal agenda and options of politically appointed persons. In particular an informant-political figure, during his mandate tried to solve the riddle of low absorption. To that end he formed a committee of experts to study and suggest, the best possible policy to better serve the citizens for the year 2006-2013. The findings of the committee were never adopted.

The economic sector, according to informants, has plenty of examples of discontinuity. It was noted that, even though surveillance/monitoring systems for administrative functions had been put to place for a specific timeframe, the shift in political power affected the workflow. The informants noted that faceless communication and standardization of procedures could be effective when there’s sufficient political will. There has been, according to the view of informants, a plethora of studies on the more effective operation of public administration in addition to legislative acts that have been passed and adopted during one political administration, only to be turned upside down on the next. The same discontinuity was

expressed in the staffing of public administration, but the informants think that changes in personnel do not allow for the implementation of effective changes. They consider the absence of institutional memory to be of high importance and a major factor in the discontinuities of public administration. This absence is mainly related to the constant shifts in high ranking personnel of public administration because their service is affected by the shifts in political power. It is the opinion of the informants that the appointment of public service employees who have high qualifications for the job could reduce the discontinuities that are present in public administration. In any case, they believe that the effective use of new technologies is dependent on specialization and knowledge update and renewal. They believe that the employees and personnel of public administration should be independent from the political sphere. It is imperative that continuity in the operation of public administration is established, in order to accelerate the rationalization of its operation to the benefit of society.

Surveillance and Control

The informants noted that the constant increase in the use of ICT by the citizens and their familiarity with ICT could be a crucial factor in the modernization process of public administration. The opening of the telecommunications market - because of the commitments of the Greek government towards the EU, benefited the purchase of hardware for the households, even in an indirect way. Businesses were also forced to computerize their financial activities for their transactions with the state's financial mechanisms, something that was extremely difficult and meant long periods of familiarization and high cost of hardware etc. Their experience showed that this was far from an easy task. They expressed their reservations about the reasoning of this undertaking. In fact, they noted that public administration, as a public information and social service mechanism, would have to restore and cement a trustworthy relationship with the social corpus. Their view is that when new technologies are put in the service of surveillance mechanisms, they manage to bend dated resistances and modernize administrative functions. Besides which, surveillance is 'the collection and organization of information that can be stored by agencies or collectivities and can be used to "monitor" the activities of an administered population' (Giddens, 1987, p. 174) and one of four components of high modernization (Giddens, 1990, p. 162).

According to the informants, the citizens currently still resist the ongo-

ing recording of information and data about their everyday activities. In their view the issue at stake for a successful use of ICT and e-governance requires relationships of trust and reliability among the actors. The citizens must be convinced that all this is about the rationalization of administrative functions and that recording and organizing information on behalf of collective bodies is a crucial component of that rationalization. The balance among surveillance, control, transparency and provision of high quality services to the social corpus could be the key to open the black-box of the public administration's operation.

Thus, the use of ICTs for surveillance and control enhances political power to establish and respond to international standards and obligations of the country. However, this use has two faces. It creates suspicion and resistance on behalf of citizens, which hinders penetration and expansion of ICTs in the public administration and at the same time promotes transmission of information and services and subsequently the modernization of public administration.

CONCLUSION

Informants pointed out that the country's informatization process as part of its modernization, which has been fostered at a great extent through EU policies and globalization process is strongly related to the modes of ICTs' incorporation within Greek society. Although, the value of information technology is undeniable, the State has not invested sufficiently in ICTs in order to improving aspects of Greek citizens' daily concern. The most important investments have been mainly allocated to hardware rather than to software and management systems.

Informants emphasize the structural weakness of the state to incorporate ICT into policy planning in order to organize the flow of information that will serve citizens and social actors in general (the social body). In their view, the public sector seems to be absorbing EU funds for the implementation of short-term projects rather than to implement coherent services for serving citizens and facilitating their everyday activities. Nevertheless, an important finding based on the informant's feedback is that the legal and institutional framework in place is in line with EU regulations and requirements and meets the communication needs of public administration. That is why the informants believe that the low spread of ICT in administration is not related to a lack of legislative framework, but rather structural problems.

The informants, also, point out that the operations of public and private sectors are interconnected. It turns out that the great weakness of the public sector is its dependence on European projects aimed at restructuring the public administration without addressing the real needs in a society. Similarly, it appears that the diffusion of ICT in Greek society cannot be done only through the implementation of projects related to ICT but must also take place through state policies that aim at meeting the needs of the social body. In any case, political power through ICTs' use in public administration offers services to the citizens that promote transparency and dissemination of information. At the same time, in spite of the official campaign on on-going changes that aim to help citizens and implement transparent procedures and effectiveness through new technologies, it appears that political power uses ICTs as a new medium that serve ways of exercising power. By focusing on the use of ICTs to establish surveillance and control mechanisms, political power appears to use it for ensuring its survival.

In the shadow of the current socio-economic crisis, we believe that a new public administration, via e-governance activities, seems to be emerging with the potential to be more efficient, more productive, and could cost less, if citizens' demands and needs are taken into account. There is a need to "deconstruct" the meaning of e-governance, as well as, the reforms' objectives in view of creating a generated consensus. If we want to move forward in regard to a new public administration, all political, economic and social actors should be given an incentive to push forward those changes. Further empirical data is needed based on which next steps are being planned and implemented. From a researcher's point of view, if we take into consideration the important role administrative data have started playing in the research domain, a sociological study involving political and economic actors, as well as, civil servants and civil society who operate within an e-governance framework, would be of the utmost importance. Evidential analysis is important within the process of developing efficient and effective reforms towards an information based public administration.

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ANNEX

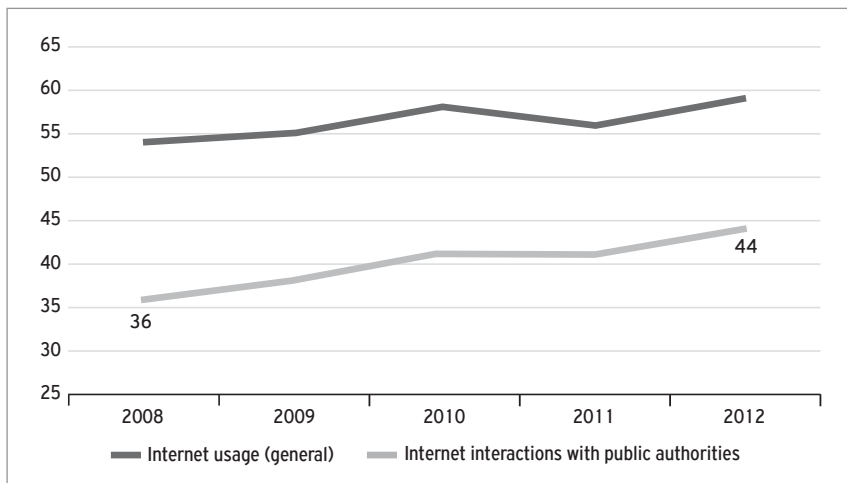
TABLE 1

Main digital governmental infrastructures referred in the article through which e-government is being realised

Digital infrastructures	Affiliated to (Public Authority)
KEP (Citizen Service Centers)	Ministry of Interior
GEMI (General Commercial Registry)	Ministries of Interior Affairs, Decentralisation & e-Governance, Ministry of Finance, Competitiveness and Maritime, Ministry of Economy
Open Government Project	Prime Minister's Office
ERMIS	Government Portal
TAXIS system	Ministry of Finances
SYZEFXIS	Ministry of Interior Affairs, Public Administration & Decentralisation

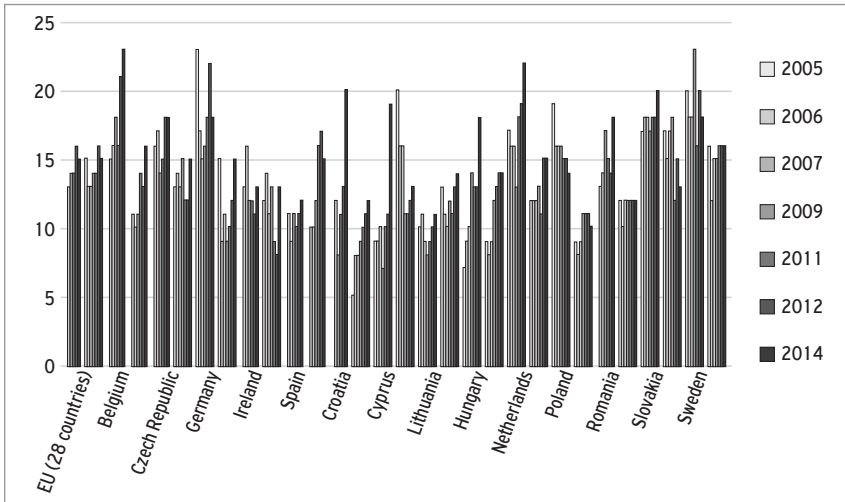
FIGURE 2

Internet use by individuals and internet use for interaction with public authorities within EU-27



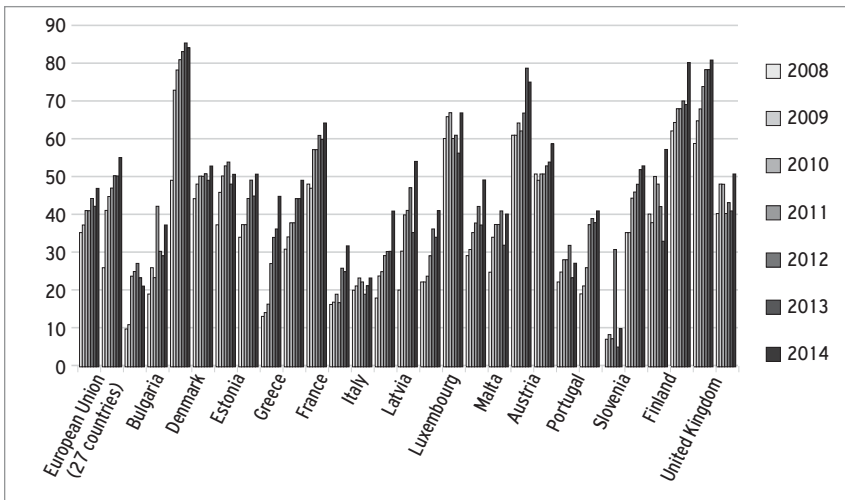
Source: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Individuals_using_the_internet_for_interaction_with_public_authorities,_EU-27_2008-2012.png#filelinks, accessed on 12/12/2014

FIGURE 3
Individuals "level" of computer skills



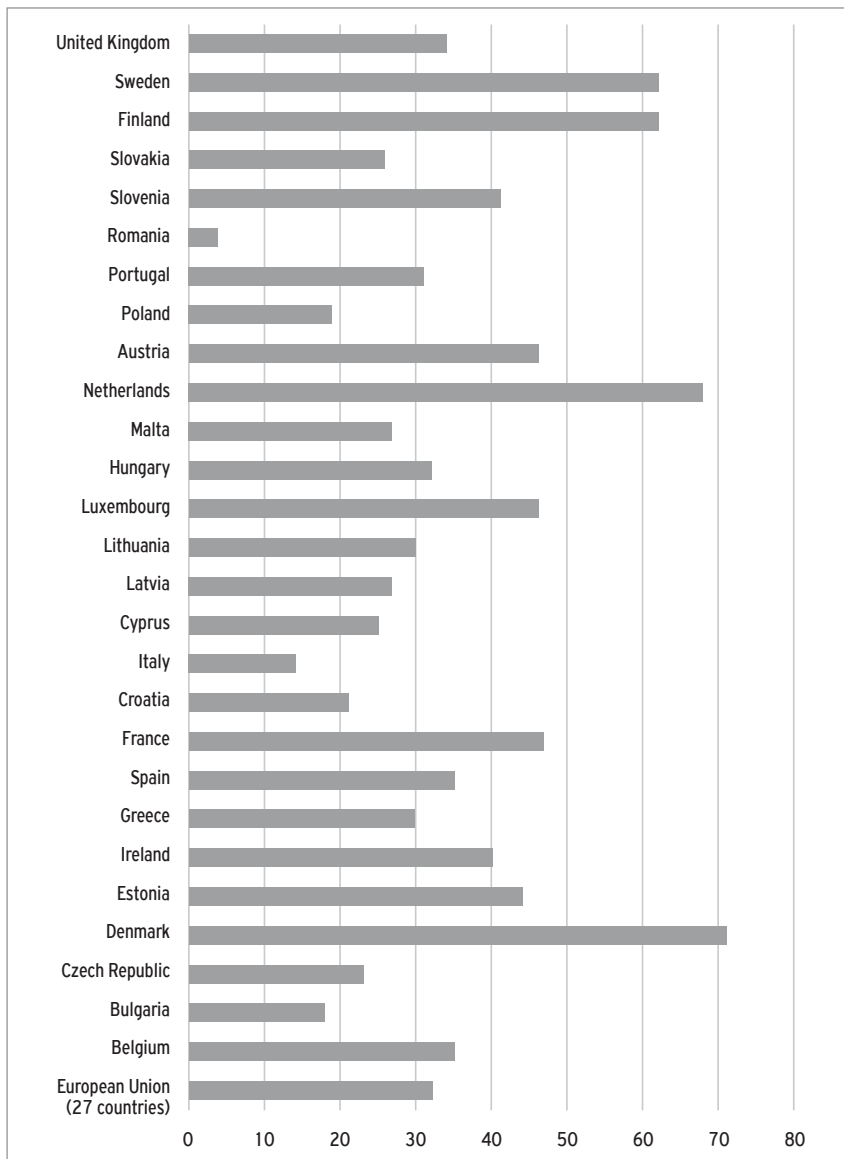
Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcod e=tsdsc460> File: Individuals' level of computer skills -% of the total number of individuals aged 16 to 74, accessed on 4/2015

FIGURE 4
Showing e-government activities of individuals via websites [isoc_ciegi_ac]



Source: Eurostat, analysis by the author, accessed on 13/2/2015, url http://appsso.eurostat. ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=isoc_ciegi_ac&lang=en

FIGURE 5
Citizen's satisfaction on finding information: year 2013



Source: Eurostat, analysis by the author, accessed on 13/2/2015, url http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=isoc_ciegi_sat&lang=en