Emerging patterns of collective representation and voice in the platform economy

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Digital labour platforms: mostly old wine in new bottles

- A **new** ‘technological fix’ (Silver 2003) based on algorithmic management

- … but reliant on **old** organisation practices of work
  - Use of intermediaries for organising and managing work
  - Home-work production, on-demand work/day labourers, piece-work compensation...

- Recommodification of labour
  - ‘virtual paupers’ (Dyer-Witheford 2015) as a prerequisite for further existence
  - health and safety issues, lack of social rights and inadequate social protection and so on...
## A constrained voice: platform workers and their structural power

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<th>Crowdwork</th>
<th>On-demand work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>Macro (freelancers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workplace bargaining power</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Fairly low</td>
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<td>Labour market power</td>
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Collective representation: platform workers’ associational power

- Micro-crowdworkers: ILO, GUFs, self-organisation, engaged academics (Fairwork Foundation)...

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<tr>
<th>Logic</th>
<th>Macro crowd-work</th>
<th>On-demand work (especially in transport)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Membership</strong></td>
<td>worker-led platform co-operatives</td>
<td>worker-led platform co-operatives; grass-root unions; union-affiliated guilds</td>
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<td><strong>Influence</strong></td>
<td>longstanding unions; labour market intermediaries as quasi-unions</td>
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Logic of membership

- Worker-led co-operatives

- Grassroots, small, relatively new unions like FAU or IWGB

- City-based, small union-affiliated guilds
  - ‘Mass self-communication networks’ being the embryonic stage
  - Examples: Collectif des coursier-e-s/KoeriersKollectief; Collectif Livreurs Autonomes de Paris; German Deliverunion AG; Deliverance Milano; Riders Union Bologna; Dutch Riders Union
  - First-ever strike of food couriers over pay by Deliveroo started in London
Logic of influence: longstanding unions – examples

● National level
  ● AT, Vienna: works council in Foodera, couriers with the help of Vida
  ● BE and SE: attempts to negotiate a collective agreement
  ● DE: cross-border works council and employee participation in Supervisory Board in Delivery Hero, with the help of EFFAT
  ● DK: world’s first-ever collective agreement with platform, Hilfr.dk, with the help of 3F

● Cross-border cooperation: ‘Fair Crowd Work’-website, an Austrian-German-Swedish union initiative

● European level, ETUC: setting-up a dialogue with the platforms and lobbying the EC
Logic of influence: labour market intermediaries

- Predating the platform economy; smoothing non-standard career paths, e.g. freelancers

- Different types: private actors or result of mutualisation by users or workers

- Membership-based cooperatives = quasi-unions, like Smart (BE) (since 1998)
  - From artists towards project-based creative workers
  - Helping with assignments and providing social protection between assignments
  - Negotiated better employment terms and conditions for food delivery couriers
  - Critique from social partners: legitimising ‘grey zones’
Conclusion

- ‘new’ forms of collective representation: platform unionism (+ freelancer unionism)

- Mutual leaning but also possible tensions between
  - Digital activism vs. bureaucratic structures
  - Taking risks vs. being opportunistic
  - Organising in the same membership domain

- No uniform pattern across countries

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