Space and Collective Voice in Platform Labour
Between online-irrelevant and offline-effective?

Labour and Space
• Traditionally, labour is conceived within the firms boundaries
• Also within the national territory
  • Changed when researching global value chains / global production networks
  • Spatial embeddedness of firms become relevant
• Digital work as important piece to the delocalisation of work (Will-Zochol et al. 2018)
  • "global information space" (Baukrowitz/Boes 1996)
  • "time-space-compression" (Harvey 1989) and "death of distance" (Cairncross 1996)
  • Recently picked up in the „anyplace-anytime“ debate
Spatially detached platform labour

- Labour mediated through digital online platforms archetype for delocalisation of work
  - Information and communication technologies allow and facilitate fast and easy communication and coordination across large distances
  - Intermediation over the internet allows for parties to be at different geographical locations
  - Social and geographical spaces are drifting apart (Will-Zocholl et al. 2019)

Is it the End of Space...?

- Commodification of labour (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Howcroft, 2014)
  - Creation of a “planetary labour market” (Graham et al., 2017, p. 29)
  - Lack of embeddedness in a firm and the absence of colleagues and temporal structures
  - Standardization and codification detach the labour process
    - “Production of placelessness” (Flecker & Schönhauer 2016)
  - Detachment from territorial legal frameworks
...or does Space still matter?

- Importance of language areas (Mandl et al. 2015)
- Strong regional concentration of online workers (vgl. Online Labour Index, Kuek et al. 2015) – not distributed evenly
  - Labour & skill arbitrage (labour is bought and sold where its cheapest)
  - High income countries represent demand, lower income countries provide supply of workers (Graham et al. 2017)
- Global labour market is in fact limited:
  - Workers from high income countries frequently receive higher income (leads to false claims of workers about their country of origin)
  - Discrimination against certain regions and countries – “liability of origin” (Lehdonvirta et al., 2016, Will-Zocholl et al. 2019)

Location-based platform labour

- Notion of space in location based platform work more fuzzy
- International corporations, but
  - … labour process is embedded locally
- Strong concentration on urban areas (Johnes, 2019)
  - Importance of co-location
- However, no common shop floor
  - Platforms specifically disperse meeting points
- Design of platforms hampers communication; no exchange between workers (Choudary 2018) – applies to digital workers as well
Work on multiple scales

- Global market (mainly digital labour), international corporations (location-based and digital labour)

- Detaching work from company structures, the labour process and national and international legal frameworks (location-based and digital labour)

- But, social and geographical space not detached entirely

- “Multiscalar practices” (Hürtgen 2015)
  - Interplay of many social and geographical scales: local labour market, transnational clients, international platforms, national and EU Regulation

- Argument: the spatial configuration strongly affects the options to organise – organising on multiple scales

Collective voice

- social dialogue & democratisation

- lack of spatial proximity

- reconstruction of social space
  - „virtual space“
  - communication
  - forums, tutorials, social media
  - mobilisation
STRIKE DAY EVENTS
- Morning Picket @ LAX
- 12 Noon: Rally
- Afternoon: Picket @ LAX
- 5-7 pm: UberLyft Driver Food Truck Party
- More info at drivers-united.org/strike

Rideshare Drivers United
www.drivers-united.org

STRIKE OFF Midnight to Midnight May 8th
Picket at the Airport

Fight Pay Cuts!
Demand the Drivers’ Bill of Rights!
Dear Jeff Bezos - A letter writing campaign

https://www.reddit.com/r/mturk/comments/2oh4de/dear_jeff_bezos_a_letter_writing_campaign/
Discussion

- Multiscalar practices that...
  - ...affect the finding of a collective voice
    - Geographically dispersed in their work setting, and socially embedded in labour markets (low/high income countries), in the overall labour process and in social structures and hierarchies
  - The social composition of the workforce is key for union strategies
  - Difference between organising and mobilization
Thank you