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TA Conference 2019

**Space and Collective Voice in Platform Labour**

Between online-irrelevant and offline-effective?

Schörpf/Herr

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**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

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## 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)

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## 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)
- Social and institutional detachment of labour (vgl. Lehdonvirta 2016, Graham et al. 2017)
  - 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 & Schönauer 2016)
  - Detachment from territorial legal frameworks

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## ...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)

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## 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

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## 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?

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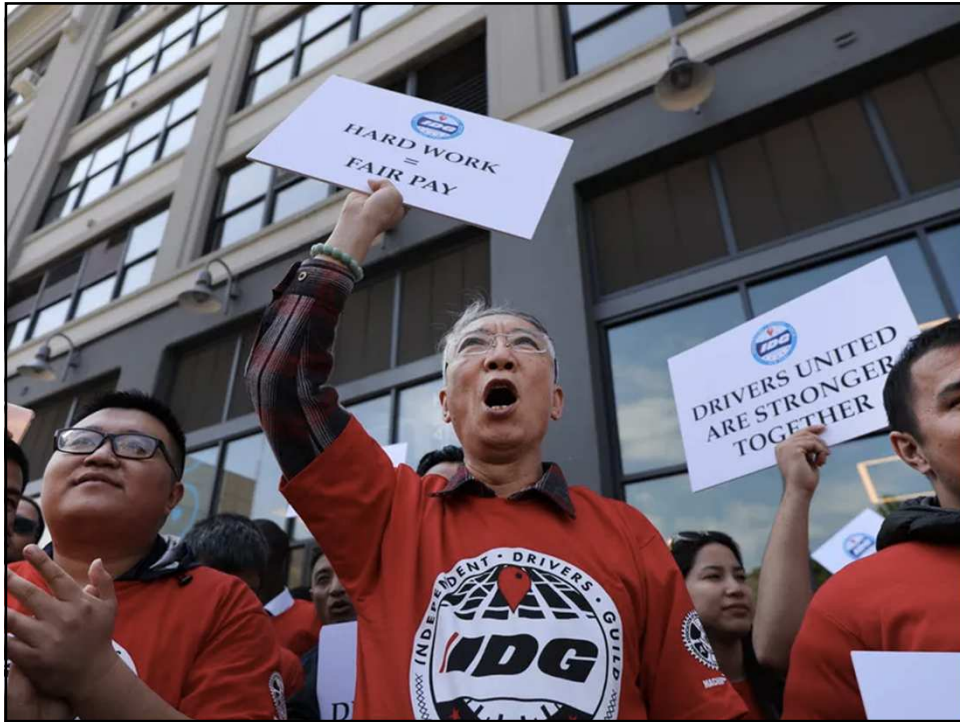
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## Collective voice

- social dialogue & democratisation
- lack of spatial proximity
- reconstruction of social space
  - „virtual space“
  - communication
  - forums, tutorials, social media
  - mobilisation

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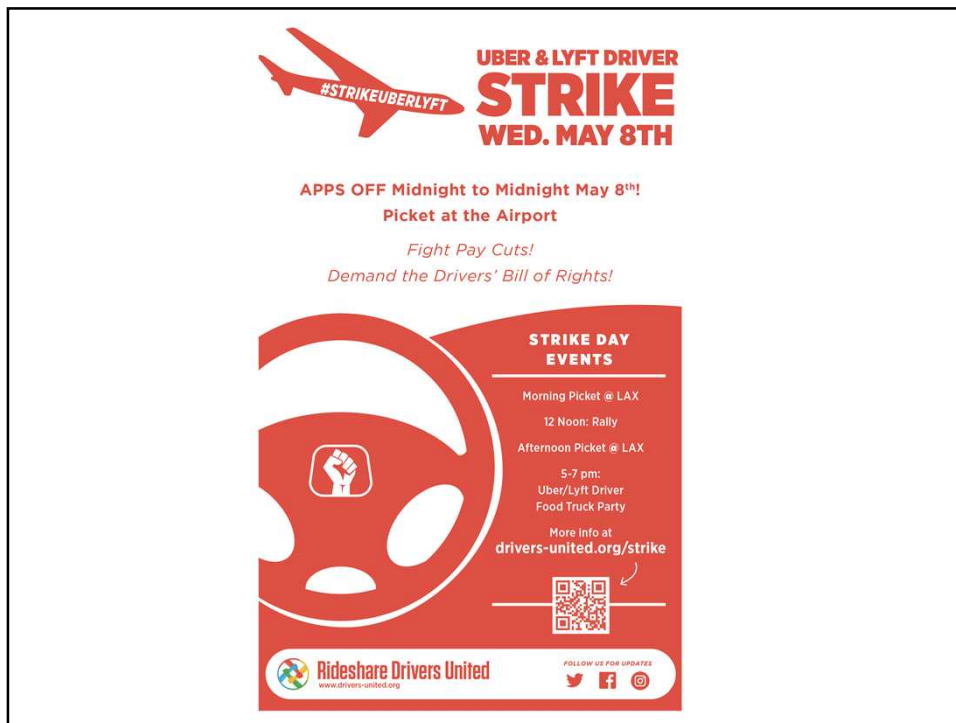
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**UBER & LYFT DRIVER STRIKE**  
**WED. MAY 8TH**


**APPS OFF Midnight to Midnight May 8<sup>th</sup>!**  
**Picket at the Airport**

*Fight Pay Cuts!*  
*Demand the Drivers' Bill of Rights!*

**STRIKE DAY EVENTS**

- Morning Picket @ LAX
- 12 Noon: Rally
- Afternoon Picket @ LAX
- 5-7 pm:  
Uber/Lyft Driver  
Food Truck Party

More info at  
[drivers-united.org/strike](http://drivers-united.org/strike)



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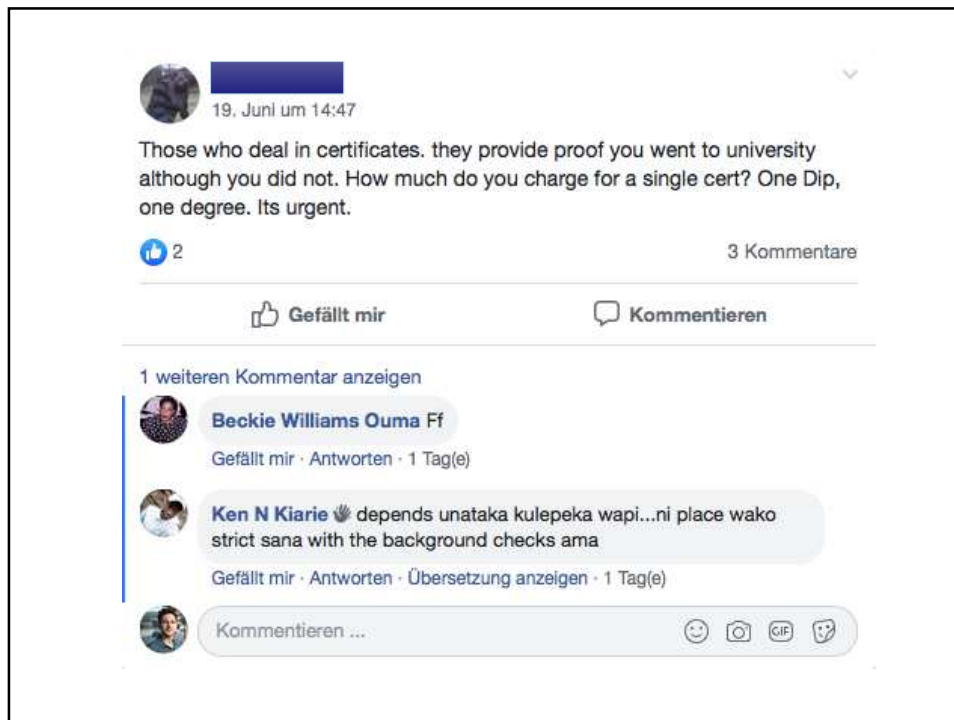
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## Discussion

- 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

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Thank you

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