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## Platform-mediated labor in Europe

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## WP1 - Platform-mediated labor in Europe

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**SWIRL– Slash Workers and Industrial ReLations**

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## 1. Digital platforms and labor flexibility: implications for ‘slashers’

In social sciences, the notion of labor flexibility has evolved over time, adjusting to fundamental economic transformations. Its varying definitions however prove to be closely interrelated, as they all describe shifts both in the market perception of the workforce and the very meaning of "labor". We will start by reviewing such definitions. Analyzing the transient nature of the concept proves to be particularly revealing of the changing perceptions surrounding labor relationships and workers status. To understand the changes that took place within the very notion of work during the second half of the 20th century, we will follow the thread leading from the approach considering employees as assets to be allocated, to the one construing them as liabilities to be mitigated.

Until the late 1970s, the occurrences of the term flexibility mainly referred to the possibility of fragmenting specialized work processes, inherited from the taylorist doctrine. Facing a steadily growing mechanization, maintaining an efficient flow in human labor allocation became crucial to the optimization of production processes. As just-in-time supply chains became more prevalent to lower the costs of logistic and storage, quick re-affectation of workers in the manufacture process or even across different organizations, became essential to maintain an efficient workflow (Frye 1974).

In this definition of labor market flexibility, workers are still viewed as assets to be deployed, and re-affected in the most efficient way. In many ways, it prefigures the surfacing of temporary employment agencies, and the ever growing cohorts of temp workers since the 1980s and the 90s. To sustain contingent workers reallocation, just-in-time employment was bound to mirror just-in-time supply chains. The most significant transition regarding employment status however, came with OECD concerns regarding member states growth in unemployment in the 1980s. The guidelines laid out at the time were by the international organization mainly focused on the reduction of non-wage labor costs, and toward loosening worker protection laws, following US labor reforms. Those recommendations influenced labor law reforms in several European countries, weakening the protections offered by long term employment in the second half of the 1980s and early 90s (Abraham & Houseman 1993; Brodsky 1994).

Following the rapid deindustrialization and tertiarization of the economy in developed countries, companies started drawing an increasingly important part of their local workforce from temporary work agencies and subcontractors. The working schedules also became progressively fragmented, for full time salaried and temp workers alike. Trends in work digitization in the following decade, starting within IT and media companies, prompted the externalization of increasingly large parts of their workforce, outsourcing tasks to countries with lower labor cost and less stringent work regulations (Mitter & Pearson 1992), resulting in the emergence of an international, highly sub-contracted division of labor (Fuchs 2016).

In the global North, traditional employment seems to stagnate, while “atypical work” shows a rapid growth. In the US, contingent work represents 94% of the observed growth in the labor market between 2005 and 2015 (Katz &, Krueger 2016). In Europe, “non-standard forms of employment” represents a larger proportion of the labor market each year since the 1980s (Bevort et al. 2006).

This obviously raises the question of status inequality: who faces the precariousness of contingent work, and who is still part of long term employment? Polarization and dualization of the labor market, although

much debated, affect the very notion of flexibility. It appears that precarious employment conditions affects predominantly “low skilled” workers, reconfiguring less-qualified jobs (Gebel & Giesecke 2011). It is then expected that the majority of the workers occupying those low-skilled, contingent jobs come from already precarious and at-risk segments of the population: women, impoverished communities, minorities, etc. (Bevort et al. 2006).

Temp work is in step with the increasingly fragmented nature of work. Job market fluidity has implications toward the traditional definition of ones “career” and—to an extent—identity (Sennett 1998; Bauman 1998; Beck 2000). Allowing workers to jump from one job to another, or even cumulate jobs, diversifying their experience, also affect their self-identification to their line of work. From this increased transience of work emerged the notion of “fissured workplace” (Weil 2014). In a phase of workers mobility across companies, it becomes increasingly difficult to build collective ties into organizational spaces (Eurofound 2018). As a consequences, this weakens collective bargaining to negotiate sector specific labor norms, working conditions and workers protection rules.

In this context, the emergence of slash work as a social phenomenon is intrinsically connected to the commercial success of digital labor platforms in the late 2000s. Both occurrences could be seen as direct ramification of long-running trends towards the servicialization of work (Prassl 2018). This slow shift in workers status, also implies a transition between work viewed as the foundation of value creation and work as yet another “service” leveraged in the production process. According to some analysts, this novel firms/workers split (the former drawing the latter from an on-demand pool as needs arise) can be seen as an opportunity toward workers autonomy and emancipation from workplace routine toil. The economist Bernard Gazier, for instance, argues that a solution to present-day labor crisis could be to generalize the archetype of the “sublimes” (Gazier 2003), qualified workers from the 19th century that transitioned from one industrial shop to another, negotiating more fulfilling jobs and better remunerations, and treating mobility as a career-building opportunity.

This discourse resonates with corporate-sponsored labor deregulation and market-led disruption. The emergence of labor platforms could therefore be seen as a stepping stone to renegotiate the established labor protection standard and employer-employee relationship. In a sense, it represents a way in which workers are encouraged to act as “entrepreneurs of the self”, maximizing their competencies, while in the meantime increasing the fluidity of the job market (Hyysalo et al. 2016).

Similarly, anthropologist Mary Gray argues that platform work could be seen as liberating, mainly through abstraction mechanisms. By studying micro-work and remote macro-work platforms, she found that hiding the workers from the recruiters behind semi-automated APIs-based work allocation mechanisms mitigates discrimination against workers and lowers access barriers to the labor market found in more traditional recruitment settings (Gray & Suri 2019). Women with breaks in their employment history due to child care, for instance, or persons living with disability aren’t necessarily at a disadvantage on these digital platforms.

On the other side, strong platform presence of minorities and persons traditionally marginalized within labor market, can be interpreted as a commercial policy from tech giants to leverage workers with less bargaining power, either individually or collectively. Economic inclusion and workers bargaining power remain major sources of concern on global digital platforms, especially when workers from low- and

high-income geographical settings complete for the same “gigs” or “tasks” (Graham, Hjorth & Lehdonvirta 2017).

By acting as two-sided markets, distancing workers from the recruiters while using algorithmic tools, effectively putting in place new forms of labor arbitrage, and by encouraging the process of buying and selling labor not only as a commodity but rather as a service, one could argue that platforms can be a viable solution to the issues raised by the flexibilization of the labor market. However, platforms unique status as both a two-sided labor market and a remote allocation device for economic inputs brings up serious questions regarding workers participation in their governance, both from the corporate and from the algorithmic point of view (Scholz & Schneider 2017). If fissured workplaces are already associated with a lack of unionization, worker isolation and platforms denying voice to their workers-users in order to avoid employer liability, the challenges ahead range from how to put workers in a position to negotiate their working conditions (adequate pay, health insurance, type of contract, social benefits, etc.), to the specific ways to help them organize in order to weigh in on industrial relations.



## 2. Building a typology for platform-mediated labor

### 2.1. Existing literature

If platform-mediated labor as a whole sheds light on larger trends within the workforce, the notion hardly designates a coherent and homogeneous set of economic activities. Just as fragmented careers and disrupted forms of labor in the secondary and tertiary sectors result from a common historical dynamic, but don't imply identical situations and working conditions for all workers, a platform work encompasses a wide variety of human occupations.

The platform typology provided by Nick Srnicek (2017) relies on the definition of platform as a coordination mechanism connecting several individuals or groups. The author thus highlights:

- Advertising platforms (Google AdWords, etc.) which monetize information provided by their users and brands;
- Industrial platforms (GE, Siemens, etc.) mainly relying on IoT to enhance manufacturing processes;
- Product platforms (Spotify, Netflix, etc.) matching consumer and producers and allowing access to goods and services;
- Lean platforms (Uber, Airbnb, etc.), that do not own the assets they make a profit from;
- Cloud platforms (AWS, etc.) hosting information and providing SaaS.

In order to move our focus on platforms that mediate labor, other classifications come into play. For instance, Flichy (2019) offers a broad socio-technical typology leaning on a novel definition of the concept of work. As the notion of employment is evolving, work, he argues, must be considered as an "involvement toward an activity, with the goal to complete it, manage the toll it takes, and realize oneself in the process". He distinguishes three kinds of platforms:

- Cultural and content-based platforms: serving content drawn from huge database sorted algorithmically, generated by professionals and non-professionals alike (video, audio, photo content, etc.);
- Crowdsourcing platforms: clients outsource immaterial work, done remotely. The skill level expected from the workers, and the time allocated to complete a task can vary significantly, depending on the platform (data preparation, etc.);
- On-demand service platforms: self-employed or non-professionals offering geographically situated, consumer-oriented services (ride-hailing services, baby sitting, etc.).

Another typology (Casilli 2019) is based on a more comprehensive definition of digital platforms as value capture mechanisms that blur the lines between firms and markets and nevertheless manage to coordinate an ecosystem of disparate economic actors via algorithmic matching. As algorithms are fueled by data, the type of labor that is necessary to digital platforms sits on a continuum of different degrees of "taskification and datafication", which interestingly correspond to distinct forms of remuneration, contractualisation, and localization.

- On-demand labor (Uber, Deliveroo, Taskrabbit) refers to geographically sticky and often underpaid gigs;
- Micro-work (Amazon Mechanical Turk, FigureEight) refers to almost-entirely remote data preparation and information sorting tasks;
- Social networked labor (Facebook, Youtube, but also clickfarms or commercial content moderation) refers to the generation and circulation of multimedia content and data.

## 2.2. Building an initial SWIRL platform labor typology

Such typologies need to be improved and partly challenged. On the one side, with the significant exception of the last one, they hardly account for concepts such as “consumption work” (Huws 2003), strongly associated with almost all type of activities described, although not embedded in formal employment. Moreover, some categories seem to partially overlap: a cloud platform can be construed as a product platform too; content-based platforms and crowdwork, for instance, rely on the same type of occupations, if we consider how content is annotated and labeled before algorithmic sorting; some forms of micro-work have to be performed locally and some border on content moderation; etc.

To take into account this literature and to overcome its limitations, the initial typology adopted for the purposes of our study relies on three categories:

- On demand personal service platforms: geographically sticky, mission-based services (generally targeting, but not limited to, consumers). E.g. babysitting, tutoring, food delivery, ride-hailing services, computer repair.
- Online freelancing: Remote or local, generally high-skilled work. Project- or mission-based. E.g. web design, translation, clerical jobs, legal assistance, etc.
- Micro-work: Short duration task-based, zero-hour or piece-work. E.g. Marketing surveys, taking pictures of product in retail stores, short translation tasks (a few words or a sentence), transcription, image tagging, data training, etc.

Such platforms leverage on-demand work, whether or not crowdsourced. The typology is mainly based on two criteria: the geographic scope of such activities (remote versus local) and the client type (B-to-B versus B-to-C). Nevertheless, each category still encompasses a large variety of situations. For instance, we can safely assume that working conditions varies quite a lot between micro-workers competing for HITS on Amazon Mechanical Turk (short tasks, with low remuneration, largely allocated via API) and freelancers offering their services on Upwork (longer, project-based jobs, where sustained interactions between the worker and clients are expected). If we focus on the European case, several empirical studies point toward a divide in crowdwork platforms (Schmidt 2017). Preliminary research shows that the workers’ situation is as diverse as the platform landscape. In France for instance, most Amazon Mechanical Turk-type micro-work platforms appeal to persons often on the margins of the workforce, caught between unemployment and non-standard forms of employment (Casilli et al., 2019). We expect that qualified, highly skilled workers operating in top segments of the labor market, negotiating “missions” or “gigs” through online freelancing platforms will display different characteristics, adopt different behaviors and be given different opportunities than the micro-workers.

The transition toward a platformized job market involves the flexibilization of white collar jobs as well as crowd-recruitment of “new data-factory workers”. Although sometimes having a primary full- or part-time job framed within the boundaries of formal employment, and despite US and European efforts for worker reclassification, when on these platforms individuals mainly operate outside traditional salaried employment, with various expected outcomes depending on their structural social positions. This prompts us to raise several questions which will help characterize and improve our initial typology of platform labor: What are the conditions in which workers operate? Are platform workers embedded in local or global production chains? Which roles traditionally played by formal employers are now undertaken by platforms? Under which conditions? For what kind of workers?

As well as some questions related to the concept of the “fragmented workplace”: how are the platforms designed with respect to the possibility of working simultaneously on multiple platforms or of combining works online and offline?

## 3. Data and methods

### 3.1. Mapping the platform landscape

The first step toward answering those questions lies in establishing a reliable map of the platform landscape. To implement an initial data collection, we asked each SWIRL partner to provide a list of digital platforms operating in the countries involved in the project (Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain). The initial collection was not aimed at establishing an exhaustive list of all European platforms, which although useful for random sampling would be infeasible. Methodically drawing and correcting a sample from an on-line data repository is prone to sample bias, costly in human labor, and requires constant monitoring for the emergence of new platforms. Here, the goal is not to build a representative (in a statistical sense) set of platforms from which we would infer a precise quantitative estimation of the European market, but to get an overview of the differential occurrences across digital platforms operating in Europe. To achieve this goal, we deployed a two-step lax quota selection system.

A first exploratory round of platforms were freely added to the list. We then hand-sorted them according to the typology previously presented (§ 2.2.). Categories are generally mutually exclusive, although platforms can sometimes belong to two or more of these categories. In this case, they are filed under the category “combination”, referring to a mix of several criteria.

Subsequently, we asked each SWIRL partner to compare their initial lists with those of the other countries, and to complement it or to provide a detailed explanation of the observed discrepancies. To mitigate selection biases we also performed a second round of triage, by asking partners to go over the overall list, and to highlight which platforms added by another partner also operated in their country. The resulting file listed 476 platforms. Between the beginning of this process and the preparation of this report, 38 of those were considered “dead”.

A second selection round, to limit the number of discontinued platforms and to ascertain the database only contained labor platforms, in accordance with the project stated goals and definitions, produced a new version of the database featuring 340 “relevant and alive” platforms operating in SWIRL partner countries. From this sample, we collected various information from the platform websites, as well as any relevant resource found via online documentary sources. The result is a database describing 26 variables, dispatched in 2 groups:

- *Contextual variables*: Information needed either to fill the database, as general meta-data surrounding the collection process or as transitional variables used to limit the sample. (e.g. Is the platform operational or discontinued? What’s the platform URL? In which partner country does the platform operate?)
- *Empirical variables*: Information collected directly from the platform websites: payment systems, geographical scale of operation, industrial sectors, services provided by the platforms, etc.

Some discrepancies in platform distribution per country can still be observed. These result partly from the two-time pseudo-quota sample method adopted, and partly they mirror existing differences among platforms operating in partner countries. For instance, fewer platforms operate in Bulgaria, supposedly as a consequence of the persistence of informal economy in Easter Europe. As our goal is not to infer

from the statistical evidences but to map the platform space, we don't expect the sample biases to strongly affect our analyses.

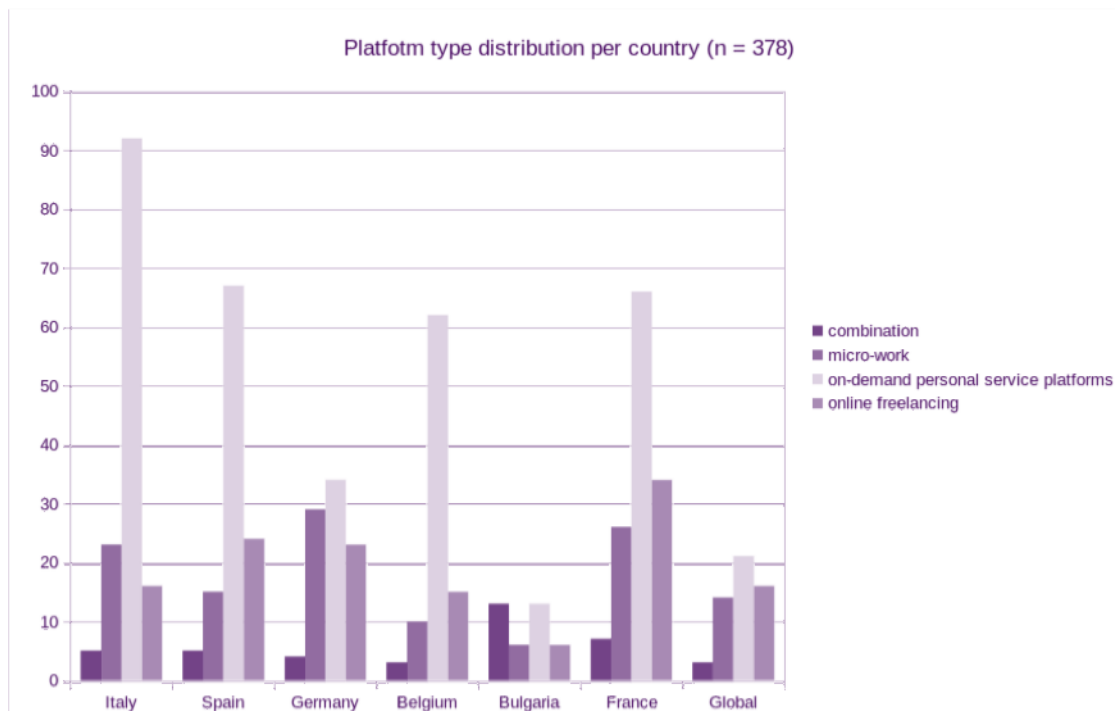


Figure 3.1: Platform's distribution in SWIRL partner countries

As one can see (figure 3.1), the on-demand services represent a large majority of our platform list. We also identified 54 platforms who operate globally. Some of those are localized on-demand services platforms. We can therefore assume that the divide between geographically bound and remote work platforms doesn't necessarily echo a "local" versus "global" one. In fact, some international platforms run geographically sticky gigs (e.g. multinational Uber provides city-specific services) while some local ones can allocate tasks which can be performed remotely (e.g. German platform Crowd Guru outsources small tasks to workers in developing countries).

### 3.2. Characterizing the social space of platform labor

As the goal of this report is to provide a description of the social space where platform labor takes place, we are less interested in linking variables co-occurrences to causes than to describe the patterns emerging among those co-occurrences. This allows us to characterize the different platforms operating in Europe and their attributes from a non-representative sample. To do so, we employed factor analysis.

Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) is a geometrical analysis method, used to visualize information contained in large datasets. It offers the advantage of visually mapping the different

variables and observations used to run the analysis in an orthogonal geometrical space. It represents a sound methodological choice in our case for two main reasons:

- 1) we exclusively rely on qualitative variables, and geometrical methods don't operate under inference or causality assumptions. The method is therefore conceptually in line with our dataset.
- 2) the method is data-driven, allowing us to test the relevance of our top-down platform typology in a bottom-up context.

Before the analysis, our empirical variables were transformed following a binary split. For instance, the original "Type of clients targeted by the platform" variable offered 3 categories: "Business to Consumer", "Business to Business", and "Both". It has been split in two non-exclusive variables: "Platforms target consumers" and "Platform target businesses" showing binary "Yes" or "No" values. A detailed description of the variables, their categories, and their missing values rate is shown in Annex 1. Variables with a missing values rate above 50% were excluded, the rest of the missing values were imputed using missMDMA R package by realizing iterative MCA imputation, therefore following best practices regarding missing values imputation. We impute and analyze at the same time, using imputation method embedded in our analysis methodology. The imputation method assumes that data are missing at random, which is a strong assumption, mitigated in our case by the fact that we are dealing with self-collected, non survey values.

The imputed dataset was used only to derive the MCA, not to characterize the results. The empirical variables set was used to run the MCA, while the contextual variables (our ad hoc typology for instance, or the 'Country' column) were used as supplementary variables (merely projected on already structured axis). For an overview of the active variables (actively structuring the analysis) and the supplementary variables, see the table in Annex 1. All the variables showing modalities with  $n < 30$  were used as supplementary variables, in order to minimize artificial axis distortion.

### 3.3. Results

As we observe a rapid fall of axes' relative inertia after the second one (24.4% of variance explained by the first axis, 16.6% for the second one, 9.9% for the third axis), we choose to focus our analysis on the 1st and 2nd dimensions. For a detailed account of categories contribution to the axis structure and  $\text{Cos}^2$  see the table in Annex 1.

SWIRL platforms map (n = 378):  
Active modalities projection on MCA's 1st and 2nd axis

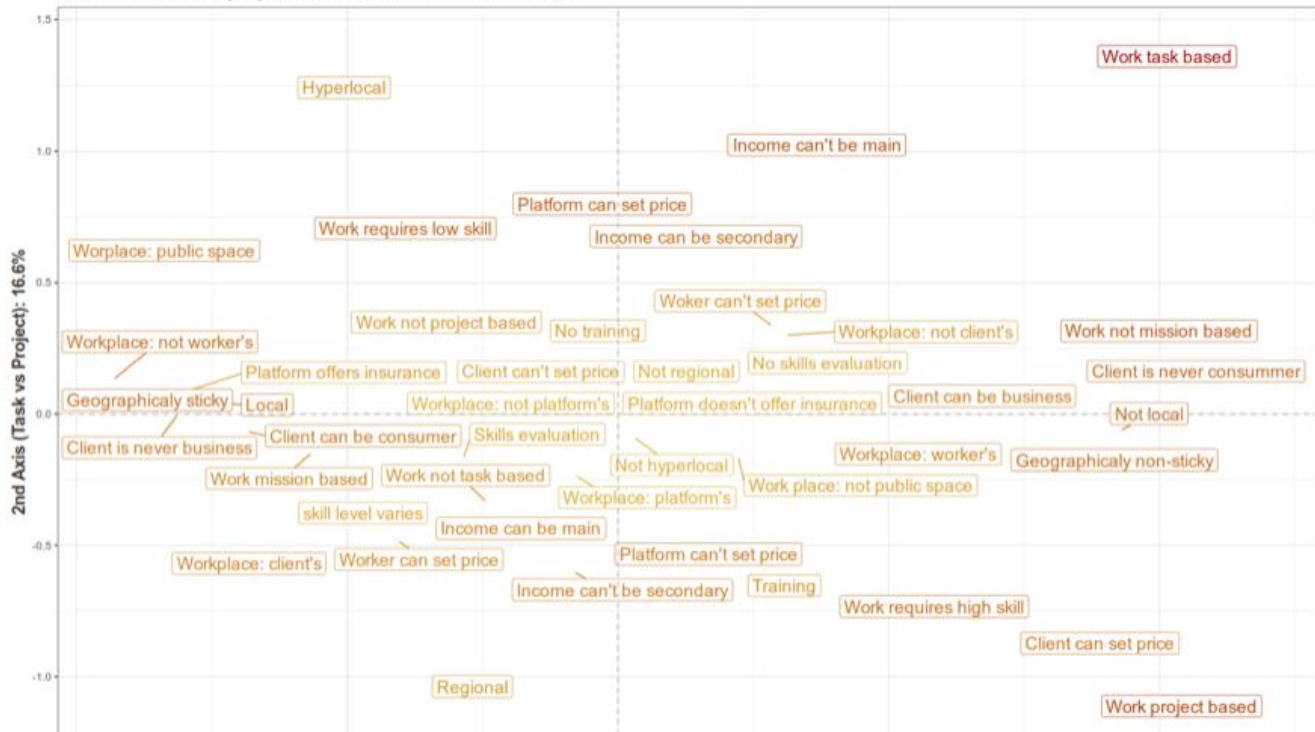


Figure 3.2: Active category projection on the social space

- **The first axis** is driven by the opposition between geographically sticky platforms (no matter the geographical scale of operations), with individuals who work outside the home to provide consumer-oriented services rather than business-oriented ones, provide work fragmented into “missions” rather than “tasks” or “projects”<sup>1</sup>, where workers tend to set the price of the mission; versus business-oriented platforms, with workers operating from home, performing tasks or projects (but not missions) that can be carried out remotely.
- **The second axis** is driven by the opposition between platforms that provide project-based work, where the client sets the price of the jobs, the work requires qualified skills, and where the platform provides training for their workers; versus platforms that help workers found tasks, hyper-local platforms, platforms where the money earned doesn't represent the worker's main income<sup>2</sup> and where the rates are not established by the worker.

1 Work type is a contextual variable in the database: We sorted the platforms according to their work attribution mechanisms. “Task” represent short duration jobs, fragmented along interchangeable units (eg.: Image Labeling work); “Mission” represents longer duration jobs that involve a sequential number of tasks, done by the same worker in order to carry out every step of a job (eg. bike delivery services); “Project” represents jobs involving some kind of project management skills (eg. designing a website).

2 Income type is an empirical variable in the database: We inferred it from platform's discourse on expected income and from the type of workers targeted by the platform: Platforms targeting skilled tradesman (eg. electricians,

The supplementary variables' projection on the axis suggests that our top-down platform typology integrates nicely with our data driven dimensions:

- The first axis opposes on-demand services to both online freelancing and micro-work platforms.
- The second axis opposes online freelancing to micro-work.

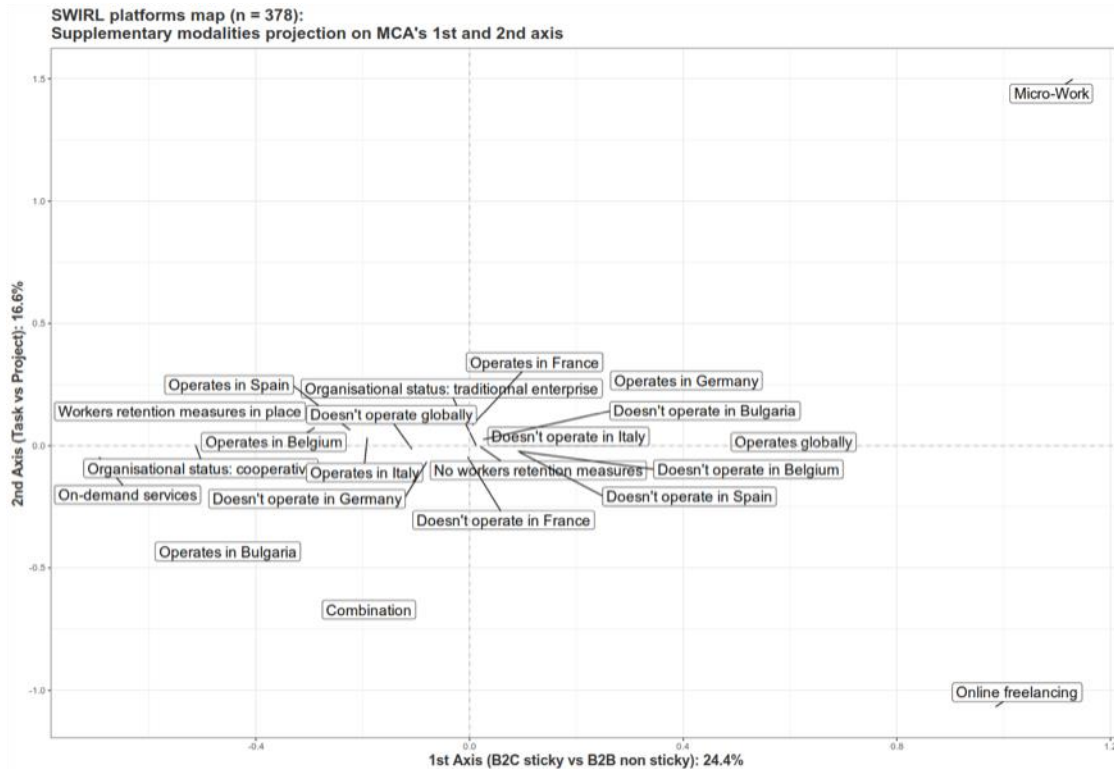


Figure 3.3: Supplementary category projection on the social space

Notably, the categories “the platform doesn’t set the price”, and “the platform provides workers with training” are projected diagonally between on-demand workers and freelancers. We have an interesting aggregation of freelancers and micro-workers on the first axis: space and activity scope seems to be what differentiate the most our sample.

Incidentally, the second axis also points to an unequal power structure in the on-demand group, split up on both sides of the axis, spread along the categories: “cooperative platforms” aggregated to “workers set the job price” and the “revenue represents the main income of the worker”; opposed to the categories

lawyers) or platform specifically stating that the activity should be considered as “full-time” were sorted in the “main income category”. Platforms specifically stating that workers should expect complementary revenue from jobs done via the platform were sorted in the “supplementary income” category.



“workers operate in the public space”, “work demands low skill level” and “platform operates at a hyper-local level”. This calls for a more thorough investigation of the “on-demand services” group.

The variable “country” doesn’t seem to have effect. This suggests we were able to correct the expected data collection bias due to the sampling method adopted.

### 3.4. Clustering

MCA allows projection of observations on the axes. In fact, it allows us to build a “map of the statistical observations”. Each platform in our database has a set of coordinates on the two axes. Conceptually, those coordinates represent adherence to the axes, often used to compute individual “scores” on behavioral profiles. Here we used such coordinates as quantitative variables to compute k-means clusters. The goal is to get homogeneous groups of platforms from our MCA dimensions, describing bottom-up data-driven platform typology. Given our distribution on the orthogonal space (figure 3.4), k-means assumption of circular clusters seems relevant. We checked the number of clusters to select with both a hierarchical ascendant clustering dendrogram and with a scree plot. Both of these methods gave 3 clusters as a good balance between information synthesis and group homogeneity. By projecting membership in a cluster on the observations’ map, we obtain results extremely close to our ad-hoc initial typology.

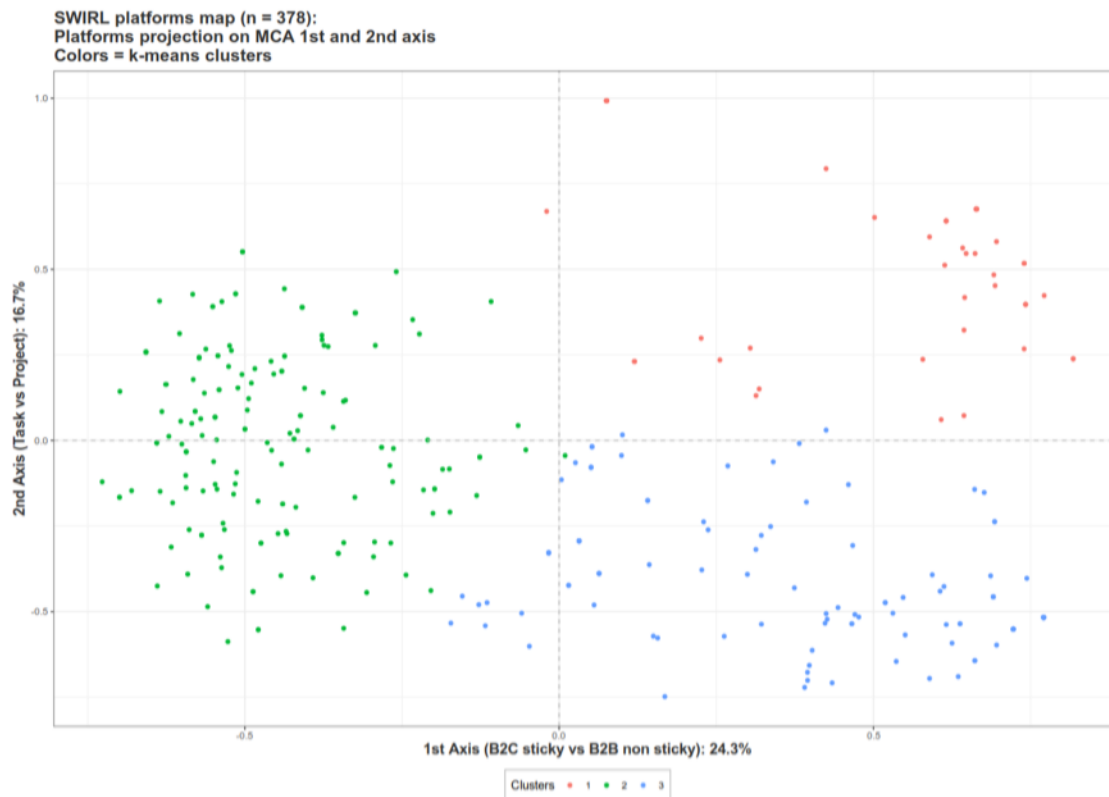


Figure 3.4: Platforms projection on the social space

A quick look at the active variables structuring the axis allows us to contextualize our clusters:

- Cluster 1: **Crowdwork**: contains platforms displaying a task based work-flow, and on which the revenue generated is not the worker's main income.
- Cluster 2: **Local consumer-oriented services**: contains platforms that are displaying a geographical stickiness, mostly B-to-C mission-based platforms. However, the cluster seems dispersed across the second axis, which warrants a more detailed investigation in the desk analysis.
- Cluster 3: **Self-employed working remotely**: contains platforms that show a project-based workflow where the client sets the job's rate. Moreover, the jobs listed on the platform are considered high-skilled ones.

The results summarized in table 3.1 show the intersection between our top-down and bottom-up typologies, which confirms our visual interpretation.

	<i>Cluster 1</i>	<i>Cluster 2</i>	<i>Cluster 3</i>
<i>Micro-work</i>	68	0	0
<i>Combination</i>	1	6	8
<i>On-demand services</i>	5	177	35
<i>Online freelancing</i>	1	4	71

Table 3.1: Top-down and bottom-up typologies overlap

### 3.5. Desk analysis selection

The MCA shows a clear divide among the platforms, along geographical and client type lines, as well as along a work division and skills requirement one. While underlining the importance of the spatial division of labor, this divide also seems to imply a power imbalance in the platform-work division along the second axis. The main factors differentiating freelancers from crowdworkers, if we do not account for geographical stickiness or work fragmentation, seem to be the skill level expected to complete a job, the fact that the platform offers training for workers, and who sets the rates of the transaction. This divide rises questions as to the persistence of traditional class-based cleavages at play within platform workforce. Is there an equivalent to the “white collar”/“blue collar” split in platform work? If that is the case, along which lines does the new class divide run? What are the implication on workers’ bargaining power and influence on their working conditions?

We assume that the labor platform landscape is structured along our axes, but we need more empirical field data to test our hypothesis. We therefore propose to draw 5 platforms from each cluster to build more detailed desk analysis of selected platforms. We tried to differentiate the platforms drawn from the clusters, using information available in the database, along the following variables:

- Required skill-set for job completion
- Price model
- Training / services (insurance, etc) provided by the platform
- Job type (mission / task / project)
- Geographical scale of operation, and implications (public space, etc.)
- Workers’ contract status

<i>Local consumer-oriented services:</i>	<i>Crowdwork:</i>	<i>Self-employed working remotely:</i>
<i>Helping</i>	<i>Fanslave</i>	<i>Fiverr</i>
<i>Coopcycle</i>	<i>Roamler</i>	<i>Avvocatoflash</i>
<i>Rover</i>	<i>99designs</i>	<i>Houzz.it</i>
<i>Prontopro</i>	<i>foulefactory</i>	<i>Freelancer</i>
<i>Heetch</i>	<i>Iadviz</i>	<i>Upwork</i>

*Table 3.2: Desk analysis platform selection*

We also tried, when relevant, to select for each cluster platforms for which our top-down and bottom-up typologies diverge. For instance, there are 38 on-demand platforms in the first cluster, while a majority of the cluster is composed by online freelancers. This approach allows us to get a better idea of in-cluster variability. The 15 hand-selected platforms are presented in table 3.2.

The sample thus obtained is nicely dispersed on our orthogonal space, allowing us to more thoroughly explore various points on our social map (figure 3.5).

SWIRL platforms map (n = 378):  
Case studies platforms projection on MCA 1st and 2nd axis  
Colors = k-means clusters

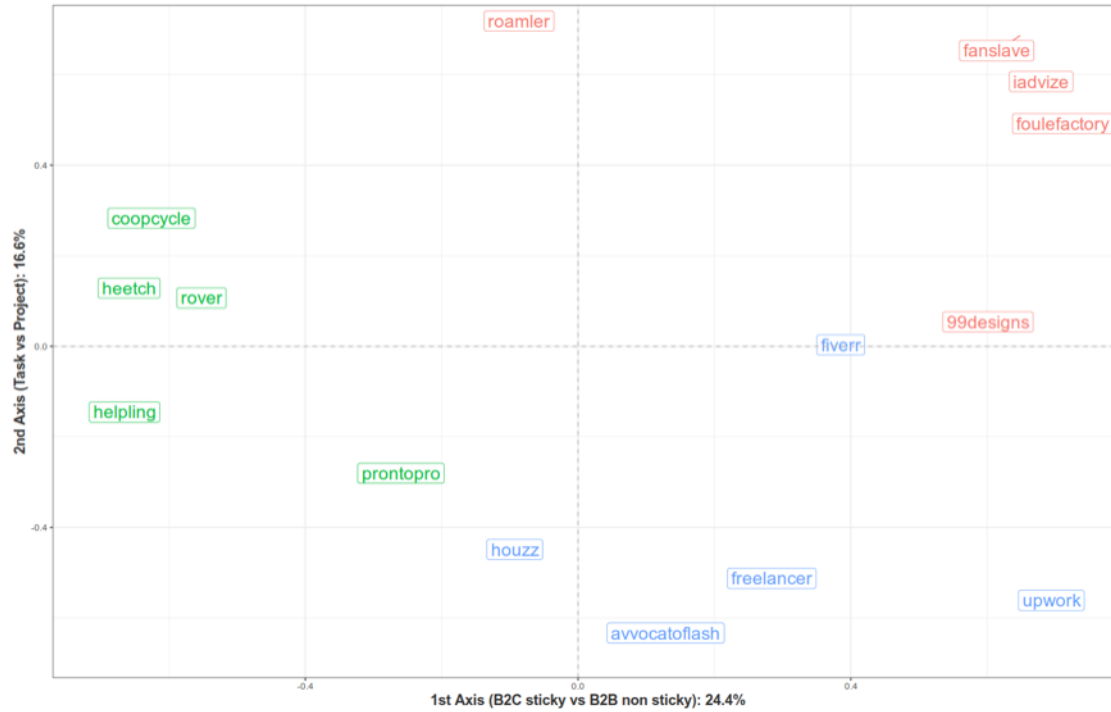


Figure 3.5: Projection of the desk analysis platforms on the social space

## 4. Desk analysis

The idea underlying the fifteen desk analysis presented in the following section is to lay out a purposive and comparative qualitative data collection informed by the hypotheses derived from our social map of the platform ecosystem. Expanding on some database entries by collecting more granular empirical data allows us to enrich the analysis while compensating for our representativeness issues. The intent is both to study the clusters' composition to better interpret the classification, and to highlight in-cluster variations.

To do so, we leveraged online material made publicly available by the platforms (website, forums, blogs), workers resources (external forums, blogs, and platform rating services such as foxyrating.com), relevant scientific and legal papers, as well as press and media sources. The data collection process was successfully completed using a template derived from the variables described above. The full results of the desk analysis are available in the supplementary documentation (Annex 2), while the main conclusions are detailed below, with reference to specific cases.

### 4.1. Crowdwork

The crowdwork platforms we focused upon were generally featuring short term low-paying jobs. The jobs listed ranged from buying social media “likes” and “shares” in bulk, for marketing purposes, from a pool of remote crowdworkers (Fanslave) to completing simple design tasks, mainly producing and editing logos (99designs). As a whole, it seems unlikely that work on any of those platforms alone can provide a stable way of earning an income. It is more likely that workers are active on more than one platform, or cumulate their platform activities with a primary formal employment. Some platforms display a work distribution and a payout structure that follows a Pareto law (a limited percentage of big earners carry out most of the tasks listed) (Foulefactory, 99designs), and even if we couldn't find relevant information for the other ones, we can reasonably assume that they follow the same work distribution law. Generally, the work allocation methods, the interactions between workers and clients and the design of worker rating systems contribute to preventing workers to capitalize on skills or good reviews accumulated on one platform to advance their careers on other platforms or formal jobs (with the partial exception of 99designs).

We found consistent evidence that highly specialized platform work has an impact on one's career perception (99designs). Fragmentation and taskification of complex processes represent a problematic aspect of the operation on several platforms. The presence of interchangeable tasks turns out to be highly divisive, especially among the design community. On companion forums, we found several instances of designers describing “taskified design” as an oxymoron.

All desk analysis in this cluster attest that platforms have significant control over work distribution and management processes. For each gig, the rate is either established by the platform (like in the case of Roamler) or by the client (like on 99designs). The platform generally handles client-workers interaction (Roamler, Foulefactory, Fanslave, ladvize), and set task deadlines, thus affording little flexibility to

workers. Notably, platforms listing jobs that leverage specialized skills seem to allow workers to constitute a personal client network (99designs). On external online forums workers reference clients building pools of “trusted freelancers” for their outsourcing needs.

Some platforms base their business model on a two-step value extraction process. Fanslave front business, for instance, is to intermediate between clients looking to buy “likes” on social media platforms, and workers capitalizing on their social media community (to avoid being flagged as fraudulent, likes need to come from “real persons” and not from bot-like accounts). However, we suspect that the platform may be profiting from information extracted from their workers’ social media accounts, for targeted advertising purposes. On worker forums we encountered several complaints about wage theft (Fanslave), arbitrary algorithmic account deactivation (Fanslave, Foulefactory), and IP infringement (99designs).

In most cases, either the platform did not provide a place for workers to meet and share their experience, or provide a heavily moderated forum. On Foulefactory’s forum, calls for “task strike” by workers dissatisfied with the platform conditions have resulted in the deactivation of several accounts. This approach heavily affects workers’ ability to self-organize and develop collective bargain strategies.

## 4.2. Local consumer-oriented services

The platforms in this cluster provide mission-based consumer services, from dog sitting (Rover) to handyman services (Prontopro). Some platforms (Helping) adapt the legal status of their workers to the local legislation of the country where they operate (long-term contracts in France, temp agency in some other countries). Generally speaking, it seems that work obtained through this type of platforms can, and quite often does, constitute a worker’s main source of income (Heetch, Helping, Coopcycle), this fact is sometimes reflected in the worker’s legal status as a full time employee (Helping in France, Coopcycle).

In all cases, workers directly interact with clients on a face-to-face basis. To some extent, this interaction is consistent with workers’ expectation of developing a network of clients outside the platform. On some platforms (Helping), workers seem to be able to capitalize on client reviews when searching for similar jobs in more traditional setups. Even though it is often discouraged by the platforms, on online forums workers discuss finding jobs on competing platforms (Heetch). However, this seems to have more to do with earning a sustainable income than with mitigating platform dependence.

Cab-hailing app drivers and delivery riders are a special case in SWIRL partner countries. They constitute a highly visible group operating in the public space, directly interacting with consumers, and their status is heavily debated. In France and Italy, some unions actively defend and organize those platform workers, sometimes creating controversies among different federations of the same union. For instance, French union CGT-taxis claims that Heetch is interfering with lawmaking, and is infringing on taxi drivers’ rights. Often traditional unions have actively tried to organize local consumer-oriented platform workers, with various degrees of success. Cab-hailing app workers are particularly active on external forums (Heetch), as the entire sector has been undergoing major regulatory attempts (see for

instance the 2019 Law on Mobility Orientation in France), and has witnessed protest and direct actions led by platform workers. Some bike delivery riders use self-organized legal structures to depart from “big tech platforms”. Coopcycle is a federation of local coop-structured bike delivery platforms. Those cooperative structures also pursue social and mutualistic purposes, providing training, education, communication kits, worker rights defense tools, etc. Interestingly, Coopcycle also offers training in IT and software development, to allow big tech workers to build a bottom-up local coop in their town.

Other consumer-oriented platforms are generally closer to a Craigslist-type classified advertisement space for consumer services (handyman, pet-sitters, etc.). Platforms acts as an intermediary with a client buying a service from a temp worker (Rover, Prontopro). In most cases, no instances of communication among workers of those platforms were recorded. Prontopro is probably closer to a contact list for self-employed workers, which likely operate on other platforms, too. Heetch and Helping seem to have a more proactive role in work management and mission allocation. In these desk analysis, workers often find themselves competing for missions (Helping, Rover), sometimes on a bid-like system (Prontopro). Conceivably, geographical stickiness partially limits the resulting downward pressure on remunerations.

### 4.3. Self-employed working remotely

The platforms in this cluster generally (with a few notable exceptions) offers medium-duration, project-based jobs, which range from 99designs-like short design tasks (Fiverr) to traditional clerical and legal processing support activities (Avvocatoflash). Generally, project allocation on those platforms also follows a power law (Upwork, Fiverr). However, contrary to crowdworking platforms, more frequent worker-worker and worker-client interactions can be observed, as well as a greater diversity in terms of job organization and work attribution processes. For instance, Upwork allows quasi-agency structures to compete with individual freelancers to win jobs.

Platforms also seem to generally offer workers coordination resources such as integrated online chats or forums. Fiverr affords a very active internal forum which seems weakly moderated (the first post we stumbled upon was titled “Fiverr is a scam”, and a moderator was actively involved in the discussion thread). The strong client-worker interaction resulting from more complex, longer duration projects, acts as an incentive for recurring clients to build pools of already vetted workers. Maintaining a reliable client network seems to be a widely used strategy among workers, in order to build a sustainable business (this subject comes up several times in the forums). Often workers negotiate directly their rates and deadlines with the clients (Upwork, Fiverr, Avvocatoflash). Those platforms are also likely to provide seminars, either online (Upwork) or even in-person (Fiverr), on how to create an independent business (managing clients, legal requirements, etc.). Even though each platforms claims it should be well suited to provide enough opportunities to sustain one’s business, forum participants relate several instances of simultaneous use of competing platforms.

Already highlighted in existing literature, a continuum between crowdwork and self-employed remote work can be observed across two of our clusters. On Fiverr, and especially on Upwork, there is evidence



of micro-work outsourcing. Especially on Upwork, heavy hitters (workers with sufficient seniority and reputation to win bigger project bids) take work from the platform, split it in smaller tasks, then pass it right back into the platform at a lower rate by dispatching it to a crowd of individual workers, thus creating dynamics of re-intermediation (Lehdonvirta, Hjort et al. 2015).

Therefore, although relying on projects, the platforms belonging to this cluster also advertise “taskified projects”. Their effect on workers career perception is comparable to the one observed on crowdwork platforms. For instance, Freelancer might advertise specialized technical projects, which are not regarded by some designers as “proper” design. Moreover, some work allocation systems apply a downward pressure on workers’ remunerations, due to the generalized competition for gigs (see Upwork’s real-time bidding). For the most part, on global platforms negotiating projects that can be carried out remotely, price competition negatively affects the rates compared to those of traditional self-employed jobs (Freelancers, Fiverr, Upwork).

Once more, forums convey a conspicuous amount of complaints about arbitrary algorithmic account deactivation, with little to no explanation (on Upwork), non-transparent algorithmic ranking (on Fiverr), as well as complaints about intellectual property theft and work stolen by scammers posing as clients, with legal protection provided by the platform (Freelancers). Often workers voice their belief that platforms hold a pro-client bias (Upwork, Freelancers).

Within this cluster, Avvocatoflash is an outlier. The platform seems to mainly serve as an intermediary between self-employed professional lawyers and clients (businesses or individuals). Outside establishing contact, the platform serves no role: once a project and a professional are matched, clients and lawyers are expected to meet up in person, and conduct business. Houzz is supposed to work on a similar principle, but this platform’s price structure suggests that it is mainly based on extracting value from secondary, non-remunerated work, by using photographs posted by designers to attract clients to feed an advertisement-funded recommendation engine. Little evidence of collective actions against platforms exists, but Houzz workers circulated a petition to compel the platform to respect US copyright law in connection with content produced by designers hosted on the platform.

#### 4.4. Lessons learned from the desk analysis

Overall, the case studies presented here suggest that our bottom-up typology displays notable in-cluster and between-cluster variation. Significant differences can be observed in workers’ legal status between the cluster of local consumer-oriented services and the other two, as well as considerable in-cluster variation. In several cases, workers in both the clusters of crowdworkers and in that of remotely-working self-employed professionals are considered as simple “users”, while platforms describe themselves as mere technical resources to access communities of clients. Conversely in other cases (Avvocatoflash), it’s the clients who are referred to as “users”, while platforms adopt an agency-like structure.

Worker-platform mediations thus revolve around each platform’s terms of services (ToS). Such documents are not subject to traditional bargaining processes around legally binding working conditions frameworks. They unilaterally establish conditions according to platforms preferences, and may be

subject to abrupt and non-negotiable changes. As a result, regardless of the cluster, workers complain about platform pro-client biases in the mediation processes. Criticism of arbitrary algorithmic account deactivation and of non-transparent worker ranking in internal search engines is also widespread across clusters. Creative workers, no matter the expected complexity of the gigs they negotiate, also complain about IP infringement. They sometimes organize against specific platform (Houzz). Across clusters, workers voice their dissatisfaction with wage theft and lacking legal protection from the platform.

As expected, geographical divides are an important factor in worker-client interaction, and they don't necessarily favor worker-worker interactions. Although they share a common region, city or neighborhood, platform design or competition for gigs can set workers apart. The sector where we observed the most debate, calls for regulation, and workers collective organization was by far the on-demand cab-hailing and bike delivery platforms which, as already stated, seem to constitute special cases within the cluster of local consumer-oriented services. A possible explanation, which certainly calls for further investigation, may be that these workers are conspicuously present in public spaces, and that they have the opportunity to interact directly with consumers.

Among remote workers, the divide between crowdworkers and freelancers seems to have more to do with individual workers' ability to build and leverage a reliable client network, thus mitigating algorithmic influence. This skillset partially depends on the nature of the work being traded on the platforms, as long as more complex project demand some level of client-worker interaction in comparison with short-term tasks. But that is also highly dependent on technical choices made by the platforms, as well as on specific modes of platform governance. Inequalities among workers are more prominent on big on-demand, remote work platforms such as Fiverr or Upwork, where crowdworkers are rendered invisible by informal intermediaries and middle-persons.

## 5. Discussion: platforms and slasher subjectivity at work

The cases discussed in the previous section of this document raise questions as to the persistence of class divides and social capital differentials among platform-based slash workers. There is little doubt that every part of the social space shaped by digital platforms displays growing precariousness and uncertainty. However, we can reasonably assume that the transformation of labor doesn't affect every job and career path in the same manner. If precarization is unevenly distributed across industries and platforms, we can ask ourselves how it reconfigures pre-existing negotiating power imbalances among workers. Our initial assumption was that platform-mediated work results from deeper trends in workforce casualization. The MCA confirmed that the digital platform landscape is profoundly divided across lines of space and taskification.

We already knew from existing literature that these trends impact traditional high-skilled white collar freelance jobs, as well as less qualified ones. While discussing the changes occurring in the creative industry, Lorusso (2019) points out the paradoxical juxtaposition of precariousness and freedom that contemporary slash workers seem to face. Labor market recomposition and the emergence of a new subjectivity revolving around the professional archetype of the "entrepreneur of the self" imply that even the well-established and widely studied category of online freelancing is in itself complex and multifaceted.

Creative workers seem to be striving for a balance between their self-image as autonomous nomadic "sublimes" and the inherent precariousness that comes with digital platform labor. Here, arbitrary and biased algorithmic decisions, client scams, plagiarism and IP theft are rampant problems in all online labor platforms, spanning all business lines.

Platform use of ToS as a mediation tool and labor regulatory framework also affect workers' livelihoods, as they render void the very notion of regulation through negotiation between the parties involved in the production process. Moreover, they make workers liable to sanction if they attempt to organize for collective bargaining. Although such user agreements can be more or less restrictive for workers, platforms unilaterally shape the occupational structure and the composition of the workforce.

In fact, the negotiating power divide we detected along our second MCA axis seems to be mainly due to the ability of platform workers to build reliable client networks. This point seems crucial to negotiate a certain degree of autonomy and self-actualization. Nevertheless, if some platforms provide workers with training, online classes, and tutorials to allow them to run their own business, often it is virtually impossible for them to build an independent, reliable client network on online platforms, especially when gigs are carried out remotely. This fact, combined with the many instances of platforms influencing or establishing rates and deadlines, challenges workers independence touted by platforms.

In particular, the cluster containing local consumer-oriented platforms seems to crystallize an important divide, as it allows for a wide range of worker status and varying degrees of platform hands-on labor management. Compared to cab-hailing platform drivers and delivery workers, domestic and care platform workers seem to be at disadvantage both in terms of publicly voicing their grievances and of collectively organize to defend their rights. Traditionally belonging to the informal economy, less-visible

and more marginalized, some categories of workers are thus underrepresented in the regulatory debates, no matter the legal status afforded by the platforms. If we combine these remarks with the crowdworkers profiles established in the literature (Casilli, Tubaro, Le Ludec, et al. 2019), it is reasonable to assume that already fragile segments of the workforce are the most affected by platform-induced precariousness.

Finally, one notable finding from our desk analysis concerns multiple-platform usage. This topic was discussed prominently in workers' online forums, regardless of the kind of job the service focused upon or of the geographical stickiness of the activity. Based on this evidence, one can reasonably question the dependence of workers to a specific platform. However, the results discussed here suggest that workers spread over several competing platforms not for choice but because this is necessary to earn a minimum income to meet their basic needs. This aspect would need to be more thoroughly studied through focused qualitative data collection.

If confirmed, workers would find themselves in a suspended situation where they are neither entirely independent as they strive to create sustainable businesses for themselves, not explicitly dependent as they need to browse several platforms to negotiate the best gigs.

## 6. Conclusions: beyond slash work?

Throughout this report, we mapped the current platform landscape in Europe. Digital platform-mediated labor market indeed has a significant impact on worker career perception, on collective norms and labor regulatory frameworks, on interactions workers establish with their peers, on expectations of autonomy and risks associated with dependency. By inscribing workers in a highly taskified chain processes where work is often allocated algorithmically, this productive ecosystem seems to blur the lines between different professional identities. If on the one side, this is coherent with the notion of slash work, this same notion is challenged by our outcomes, as major differences exist among platforms, depending on where they are positioned in the social space described in this report.

Several platforms legally consider their workers as “users”, subject to the platform’s ToS, but some do recognize their workers as full-fledged employees. User agreements are unilaterally written by the platforms, and the source of many complaints amongst the workers. We also noted that some platforms (generally belonging to the crowdworking cluster, or to the local consumer services one) have a more hands-on approach to labor management. Concomitantly, workers displaying a higher level of independence in the management of their own activities are generally able to build a sustainable client community by interacting directly with their clients. Yet, this does not seem to be sufficient, as it is also crucial for them to successfully negotiate the terms, rates and deadlines of their work.

Although having a sustainable client network can ensure a steady demand for workers, that doesn’t seem to alleviate in-cluster inequalities. Within the local consumer services cluster, workers performing traditionally marginal and informal occupations appear less successful at organizing collectively and at having a direct public voice.

Finally, we did find instances of platforms acting as simple classified ads boards, listing profiles of high skilled freelancers and of clients, who bilaterally define the contract terms.

How does these differentials affect collective bargaining and union representation? Here, the general trend towards workforce platformization doesn’t seem to imply identical working conditions for all workers, nor the presence of slash worker implies workers identity and sense of belonging to a collective entity as necessarily disrupted. Given the context-dependency and the strong variability of workers perception of their own career, we need to rely on qualitative data to explore the embeddedness of workers in their social environment.

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## Appendix 1: Variables description

Variable name	NAs	Categories	1st Dim: contrib	1st Dim: COS <sup>2</sup>	2nd Dim: contrib	2nd Dim: COS <sup>2</sup>	Variable description
<b>Active variables</b>							
Worker_training_binary	52						Does the platform provide workers with training of any kind
		No	0,16	0,03	1,21	0,15	
		Yes	0,36	0,03	2,79	0,15	
geographical_scale_local	14						Does the platform offer geographically sticky jobs : operating at a local (city) level
		No	7	0,72	0,04	0	
		Yes	5,81	0,72	0,04	0	
geographical_scale_hyperllocal	14						Does the platform offer geographically sticky jobs : operating at a hyper-local (neighborhood) level
		No	0,02	0,01	0,21	0,12	
		Yes	0,25	0,01	2,95	0,12	
geographical_scale_regional	14						Does the platform offer geographically sticky jobs : operating at a regional level
		No	0,01	0,01	0,25	0,1	
		Yes	0,08	0,01	2,38	0,1	
geographical_scale_non_sticky	14						Does the platform offer geographically non-sticky jobs
		No	6,85	0,76	0,18	0,01	
		Yes	6,67	0,76	0,18	0,01	
work_space_client	16						Does the platform offer jobs located at the clients' office
		No	1,11	0,17	1,5	0,15	
		Yes	1,87	0,17	2,53	0,15	
work_space_worker	16						Does the platform offer remote jobs, workable from the worker's home
		No	6,16	0,58	0,19	0,01	
		Yes	4,11	0,58	0,13	0,01	
work_space_platform	16						Does the platform offer jobs performed at the platform's office
		No	0	0	0	0	
		Yes	0	0	0,02	0	
work_space_public	16						Does the platform offer jobs performed in the public space
		No	0,71	0,2	0,61	0,12	
		Yes	2,85	0,2	2,44	0,12	
set_price_client	102						Is the client allowed to set the price of the work
		No	0,51	0,14	1,02	0,19	
		Yes	1,97	0,14	3,96	0,19	
set_price_worker	102						Is the worker allowed to set the price of the work
		No	0,83	0,11	1,78	0,17	



		Yes	1,19	0,11	2,56	0,17	
set_price_platform	102						Does the platform dictate the price of the work
		No	0	0	5,28	0,5	
		Yes	0	0	7,82	0,5	
work_type_task	6						Does the platform offer jobs structured in tasks
		No	0,88	0,26	2,31	0,47	
		Yes	3,77	0,26	9,94	0,47	
work_type_mission	6						Does the platform offer jobs structured in missions
		No	8,14	0,68	0,85	0,05	
		Yes	3,89	0,68	0,41	0,05	
work_type_project	6						Does the platform offer jobs structured in projects
		No	0,87	0,24	1,78	0,34	
		Yes	3,49	0,24	7,18	0,34	
skills_eval_binary	54						Does the platform evaluate workers' skills before allowing access to jobs
		No	0,56	0,07	0,26	0,02	
		Yes	0,66	0,07	0,31	0,02	
income_main_main	46						Does the work performed via the platform can represent the workers' main income
		No	0,61	0,05	8,34	0,48	
		Yes	0,32	0,05	4,34	0,48	
income_main_complementary	46						Does the work performed via the platform can represent the worker's complementary income
		No	0,06	0,01	5,25	0,44	
		Yes	0,07	0,01	6,4	0,44	
client_type_B2B	1						Is the platform offering services catering to businesses
		No	5,53	0,58	0	0	
		Yes	4,84	0,58	0	0	
client_type_B2C	1						Is the platform offering services catering to consumers
		No	7,29	0,69	0,11	0,01	
		Yes	4,92	0,69	0,07	0,01	
skills	3						Skill requirement of the work offered on the platform
		high skills	2,01	0,19	4,7	0,3	
		low skills	0,92	0,09	6,8	0,46	
		varies	0,39	0,03	0,82	0,04	
insurance	43						Does the platform offer the worker insurance (work, health, otherwise)
		N	0,38	0,13	0,01	0	
		Y	1,87	0,13	0,04	0	
<b>Supplementary variables</b>							
Service_type_cat	1						Categories Built from previous research and the literature review
		combination					

		micro-work On-demand personal service platforms Online freelancing	
coop	6	cooperative	Is the platform a cooperative/non-profit, or a standard for-profit business
		For profit	
worker_retention	66	No	Does the platform show worker retention measures
		Yes	
fr	0	No	Is the platform operating in France
		Yes	
it	0	No	Is the platform operating in Italy
		Yes	
be	0	No	Is the platform operating in Belgium
		Yes	
bg	0	No	Is the platform operating in Bulgaria
		Yes	
es	0	No	Is the platform operating in Spain
		Yes	
de	0	No	Is the platform operating in Germany
		Yes	
global	0	No	Is the platform operating Globally
		Yes	

## Appendix 2: Desk analysis

### Cluster 1: Crowdwork

<b>99designs</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://99designs.fr/">https://99designs.fr/</a>
<b>Category:</b> Microwork	<b>Cluster :</b> 1 Crowdwork	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<i>"Fire up your freelance career. <b>You design. We'll handle the rest.</b> Do what you love, and get paid for it on 99designs. Find awesome clients and become a part of our global community of talented designers—all in a safe, secure workspace. "</i> <sup>3</sup>		
99designs is a contest-based graphic design platform founded in Australia in 2008. Its homepage claims that a new design is posted every two seconds on the platform.		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
Distinctively, 99designs lists “task-based creative work”. Such gigs are generally available as projects or missions on other platforms. Just like their counterparts in the “online freelancing” category (and unlike tasks available on other crowd-work platforms, such as Foulefactory or Fanslave), the graphic design gigs presented on this platform require high skills and extensive client-worker interactions.		
This direct worker-client interaction mainly takes place through a contest system, another notable characteristic that sets 99designs apart from other cluster 1 desk analysis. In this contest system, clients not only set the price, but effectively pay only a very small part of the total amount of work provided.		
For these reasons, 99designs bridges the gap between the microwork category in cluster 1 (Crowdwork) and the freelance category in cluster 3 (Self-employed working remotely), which is also characterized by high skilled jobs, client/worker interactions, and the fact that the platform never sets the price.		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
The jobs either take the form of a contest (designers compete for a prize, only one wins) or of a “one-on-one” agreement, in which a designer negotiates directly with a client.		
In a contest, initial specifications are provided by the client. Workers then enter a "first round" of submission of design samples. The client rates the designs and the best rated workers enters a “second round”, where they can submit more design outlines based on updated guidelines from the client (at this point, no new worker can enter the contest). At the end of the contest, one design is selected and the winner is rewarded. The others go unpaid. Data collected in 2011 showed that most users never win a single contest on the platform (Araujo, 2013), as the payment distribution follows a power law.		

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.99designs.fr/designers>

It should be noted that even though the design tasks themselves may be shorter than their freelance counterparts, payment is uncertain and workers may adopt time-consuming behaviors to maximize their chances, such as allocating more time to better-paying contests, or entering many contests with the hope of winning a fraction of them (Araujo, 2013)<sup>4</sup>.

#### **Required skill-set:**

Working on this platform requires graphic design skills, which aren't subject to any verification process. The complexity and length of the task varies depending on the contest.

#### **Business model:**

The clients buy fixed “contest packages” (between €269 and €1,119), while workers pay a fee depending on their “level” on the platform (Top Level: 5% platform fee, Mid Level: 10% platform fee, Entry Level: 15% platform fee). This ranking system could be viewed as a tentative to keep designer on the platform despite the shortcomings of the contest based work attribution process.

#### **Location:**

99designs operates globally (192 countries according to its homepage). Workers' involvement in the platform may vary geographically depending on how significant the prices are relative to local salary expectations (For instance, the homepage states : “*Macedonia owns the third dimension. They’re our #1 creators of 3D designs*”).

Workers work from home, as is often—though not always—the case with crowdwork platforms (exceptions include customer-insight based crowdwork offered on Roamler, or platforms that use brick-and-mortar “work centers”).

#### **Services provided:**

The platform mentions no services specifically. However, the portfolio built by each worker by submitting contest entries may be used outside the platform, since it constitutes a demonstration of worker competencies and talent. The platform makes it available to viewers without registration.

### **Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

#### **Worker status:**

Workers are considered “users” of the platform. According to designers’ Reddit threads, it appears that professional graphic designers recommend avoiding 99designs due to the slim chances of winning contests. The effort required doesn’t seem to match the reward, and clients have a reputation for being unprofessional and disrespectful toward works (changing specifications in the middle of a contest, asking for designers to plagiarize one another, choosing derivative designs over original ones etc...). On the other hand, client reviews on the platform convey a relatively high level of satisfaction with the 99designs’s overall quality.

In general, creative workers balk at this type of speculative work (pejoratively dubbed “design for exposure”).

<sup>4</sup> ARAUJO, Ricardo Matsumura. 99designs: An analysis of creative competition in crowdsourced design. In : First AAAI conference on Human computation and crowdsourcing. 2013.

### Working environment:

The most obvious factor influencing the work environment on 99designs is probably the absence of guaranteed payment. In a contest, all candidates work to produce design ideas, but only one gets paid. One other implication of the contest format is that it is less likely to result in worker organization due to its competitive nature. Indeed, workers' opposition to this system doesn't seem to go beyond criticizing it and attempting to dissuade others to use the platform.

This criticism appears to be closely tied to the way workers have pictured their own profession. In forums, several designers complain that the taskification of design leads clients to develop a superficial approach to their job, limited to concocting aesthetically pleasant artifacts. According to designers, this is only one aspect of their work, which also requires an in-depth understanding of the project, client's needs, and the context. However, according to them, this advanced understanding of projects cannot be achieved within a task-based workflow. For that reason, they believe design concepts found on 99designs are bound to be of lesser quality. Workers also point out client abuse, encouraging plagiarism and excessive requests.

Workers consider task-based design as a suboptimal activity. This is further attested by the fact that client satisfaction is usually higher when workers are engaged in a more "project"-oriented activity. Using the platform to sort out freelancers in order to hire them is an admitted practice. In a way the entire platform can be described as a database for freelance workers. Once they are successful enough, workers are allowed to build a client base and a portfolio. However, unlike traditional designer agencies, which usually compete against each other to win contests, 99designs operates on a "battle-royale" principle, where workers compete against each other, which, we speculate, hinders labor organization.

Contest-based systems for creative workers have often been presented as a way for newcomers to access and be recognized on the job market (Renault, 2015)<sup>5</sup>. This may be true to an extent, but Araujo shows that success in 99design follows a power law. A minority of participants in contests account for a large amount of the total wins, and that requires to adopt specific strategies regarding contests. This observation questions newcomer's abilities to successfully compete for jobs on the platform.

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<sup>5</sup> RENAULT, Sophie. Perception des participants à un concours créatif. *La Revue Des Sciences de Gestion*, 2015, no 2, p. 85-94.

<b>Fanslave</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.fanslave.com">https://www.fanslave.com</a>
<b>Category:</b> Click -work	<b>Cluster :</b> 1 Crowdwork	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p>Founded in Switzerland in 2011, Fanslave claims 1,995,938 users on 05/06/2020 (according to a real time user counter).</p> <p>Its activity, which is described as "<i>social media marketing</i>", consists in selling social media interaction (views, likes, followers, comments etc...) from workers (referred to as "fans") whom embed their social media accounts on the site.</p> <p>Fanslave claims that this practice doesn't constitute a violation of social media's terms of service (and by extension, that its activity is legal) due to the fact that "fans" are actual social media users, not automated bots. The platform claims that its activity doesn't differ from a regular advertisement campaign (workers are presented with links, and choose which ones they want to interact with) except for the fact that users receive a "bonus".</p> <p>According to Fanslave, clients do not "buy fans" but visibility, thus denying that "fans" are, in fact, clickworkers. The platform emphasize users' freedom, which incidentally contrasts with the platform's name.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"No user would like a page or join a page as a "fan" without previously having decided whether, based on the content of the page, he or she would really want to be a "fan." There is no obligation on our part to sign up to a page as a "fan". The user would do so only as the result of a free decision. "</i> (– FAQ)<sup>6</sup></p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>The platform is included in the desk analysis as an illustration of clickwork. Clickwork can be construed as a more commodified and ethically shady form of microwork. It differs from other types of task-based activities in cluster 1 (data training on Foulefactory, customer support on ladvize, creative tasks on 99designs) as here tasks are solely targeted at circulating social media content in a fashion that is far from organic.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>The tasks consists in going to web-pages provided by clients and follow the client's instructions (like, follow, subscribe, etc.), after completing a captcha to ensure that the worker is not a bot. If tasks are reverted (unfollows, unlike etc.) the credits received from performing the task are removed. This entails an important feature of this platform: "fans" tend to perform clickwork both from their personal and "professional" social media accounts.</p>		
<b>Required skill-set:</b>		

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fanslave.com/faq/social-marketing/is-it-legal-to-buy-facebook-fans>

The only skill required is an elementary knowledge of social media . Unlike AMT-type tasks, clickwork requires little to no attention, and no prior training to complete the tasks themselves. However, the workers are "ranked" based on their social media presence and followers count, through an "account interactivity" metric. Tasks pay more depending on rank, and credits can either be cashed out or used to buy other workers' services. Workers may thus become clients to increase their following, in order to maximize their earnings.

Additionally, clients can buy German-speaking fans specifically.

### **Business model:**

Clients pay to have their link displayed on the platform. Workers choose which link to click on, and interact with the page. When doing so, workers earn "credits" that can be exchanged for money or spent on platform's services. Apparently, workers can also resell their credits. The only information we were able to find about how much a credit is worth is a forum post from six years ago which gives the following rate: 2credits = 1 cent (For reference, highest-ranked users can earn up to 14 credits per task). Workers can cash out when they reach €20 which, according to promotional articles<sup>7</sup> and various workers reviews (Screenshot 1). This threshold is usually reached after about one month of steady clickwork.

Interestingly, to operate Fanslave also requires access to a considerable amount worker's personal data, which may be monetized by the platform via targeted advertisement.

### **Location:**

Fanslave's interface is available in German, French, Spanish, Turkish and English, but the platform appears to operate globally. Location may only matter in the case of German speakers.

### **Services provided:**

Workers are not provided with specific services nor training.

## **Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

### **Worker status:**

Workers are considered "users", and do not fall under labor laws nor have a contract. The platform also describes payment as "awarding a bonus" to users and not as a salary or a wage for their task.

### **Working environment:**

Fanslave could not be a source of primary income, or even a meaningful source of a complementary one, given the time it takes to reach the threshold to cash out and how easy it is to lose the credits (Screenshot 1). Indeed, it seems to be a recurring complaint among users, who are customarily redirected towards a FAQ section (Screenshot 2) that states that if a client deletes their page, workers

7 Riondet, G., 2017. *Fanslave, Être Rémunéré Grâce À Vos Réseaux Sociaux*. [online] LinkedIn.com. Available at: <<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/fanslave-%C3%AAtre-r%C3%A9mun%C3%A9r%C3%A9-gr%C3%A2ce-%C3%A0-vos-r%C3%A9seaux-sociaux-ghislain-riondet>> [Accessed 6 May 2020].



lose credits from all the tasks done on that page. Even compared to other microwork platforms, spending time in these tasks doesn't seem profitable, especially since a worker's increase in ranking isn't linked to the volume of tasks performed on the platform (it appears solely based on social media follower count and activity).

Workers are allowed to share on an internal forum, mainly providing technical or commercial support. Complaints coming from workers seem to always include account deletion, or to indicate protest they will no longer use the platform (Screenshot 3). We suspect that the impossibility to earn a steady income on the platform creates a considerable workers turnover which in turn limits attempts at collective organization.

The requirement to connect workers' personal social media accounts to the platform raises concerns in terms of privacy, as fanslave collects data from these profiles in order 1) to determine ranking 2) to be able to match workers and tasks, and 3) to check that tasks are not reversed by workers after payment.

### Additional notes & Figures:



Aggiornata il 6 ago 2019

#### Sconsigliato.

Le prime 2 volte che ho raggiunto il cash out(15€),pagavano dopo 30 giorni.Ora attendo il 3° pagamento che dovrebbe avvenire entro domani,ma oggi vedo nel sito che c e un ritardo ed e' slittato al 30-4(entro)!

2 mesi e mezzo di click,con spesso presenza di bug,niente piu click in google+(chiude ad aprile)e passati non accrediti dei click di g+!

Una media di 19 cents di € al giorno!

Ti affidano un "fank rank" che e' un misto di influenza che hai nei socials,ma da 6 che avevo di rank,me lo hanmo ridotto a 4,senza spiegare come funziona questo valore e malgrado abbia io avuto piu amici e interazioni sui socials(avrebbe dovuto crescere,in teoria e non scendere di 2 punti!).

Era previsto anche paypal,ma l hanno tolto ed e' rimasto payza e bitcoin(nuovo).

Mi sento di non consigliarlo,mio malgrado,perche l idea era buona,ma da piu che l impressione di essere gestito tanto per fare e senza attenzione verso chi lavora e non rispondono mai alle emails!

Sconsigliato,a meno che non volete aspettare 2 mesi e mezzo di lavoro e poi 1 altro mese(se va bene) per prendere 15€(fees escluse).

Ad oggi,43 giorni dopo aver chiesto il cashout in bitcoin,ancora non ho ricevuto nulla!

Nel forum non rispondono,a meno che non sei tedesco(pare facciano simpatie,)o insisti.

Alle emails,peggio ancora:Mai avuto una risposta!

Screenshot 1: Negative user review on trustpilot.com

## WHY DO I LOSE MY EARNED CREDITS?

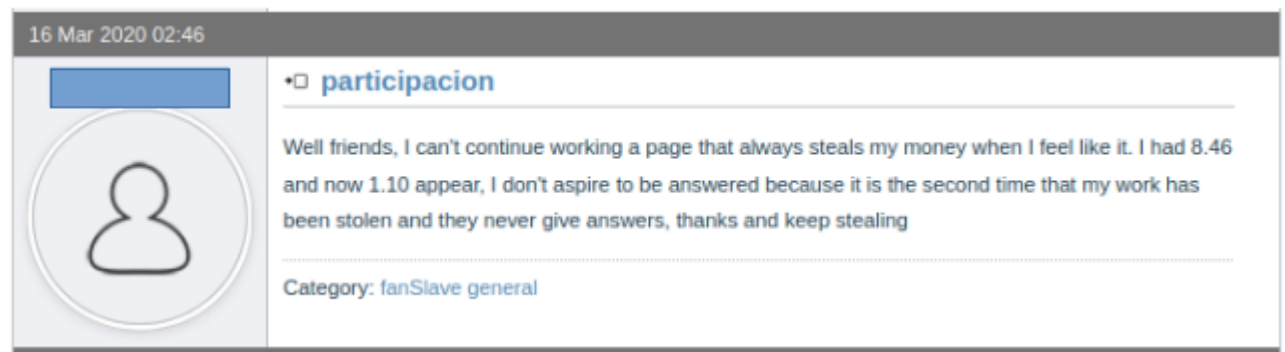
There are some possibilities why you lose credits:

1. This is probably because you entered an advertisement campaign (FB fan page, Instagram, Twitter, Google+, Homepage) and got fans or followers from us. This action costs credits.
2. Find out, if the advertiser's page still exists in Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or Google+ or if it has been deleted. If it has been deleted, your credits will be refunded.

For more info click here when logged in:

<https://www.fanslave.com/account/your-account/transactions>

### Screenshot 2: FAQ section: Losing credits



Screenshot 3: Worker leaving the platform after losing credits

<b>Foulefactory</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.foulefactory.com/">https://www.foulefactory.com/</a> <a href="https://www.yappers.club/">https://www.yappers.club/</a> <a href="https://www.wirk.io/">https://www.wirk.io/</a>
<b>Category:</b> Microwork	<b>Cluster :</b> 1 Crowdwork	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<i>"50 000 persons in France, that you can hire on demand, offer you their time and their competencies to carry out your projects 'together'."</i> <sup>8</sup>		
Foulefactory is a French crowdwork platform created in 2014 and focusing on “ <i>improving productivity</i> ” in client companies by “ <i>automating low added-value tasks</i> ”. Just like ladvize, Foulefactory is divided into a client interface (wirk.io) and a worker portal (yappers.club). It is set and operates solely in France—and exclusively with microworkers who are themselves based in France.		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
This case illustrates the most typical form of microwork: AMT-style tasks executed remotely for a very small fee. The examples provided by the platform to illustrate the benefits of crowdsourcing low-skilled tasks consist in describing how data scientists lose hours of valuable time annotating data.		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
The jobs are, as mentioned, task-based. They include data analysis (with various purposes), transcription, surveys, writing and translation, web searches and recording of audio samples . Once completed, each task has to be verified and accepted by the client in order for the worker to receive their micropayment.		
<b>Required skill-set:</b>		
The required skills are task-dependent, but mostly they involve language proficiency. Each worker's ability to complete a certain type of task is subjected to a qualification process which consists in a series of trial tasks, graded on a 1-100 scale. Tasks are supposed to be short and simple but the lack of communication between workers and clients can make them time-consuming and open to refusal <sup>9</sup> .		
<b>Business model:</b>		
Clients buy credits on platform to be able to submit tasks to the workers. The platform claims that workers can make up to €10 per hour, with a maximum of €300 a month (to discourage making it a primary source income). However, observations in workers' online forums point to a low supply of tasks		

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.foulefactory.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Casilli, Antonio, Tubaro, Paola, Le Ludec, Clément, et al. (2019). “Le Micro-Travail en France. Derrière l’automatisation, de nouvelles précarités au travail?”, report DiPLab Project (FO/France Stratégie/MSH Paris Saclay).

posted on the platform, compared to the number of worker.

**Location:**

Living in France is a requirement to join the platform. The tasks are completed remotely, from the workers' home.

**Services provided:**

The platform provides a moderated forum for the workers.

**Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

**Worker status:**

As expected with a microwork platform, Foulefactory workers are considered “users” and not employees, and are subject to the platform’s user agreement.

**Working environment:**

Workers excluded from traditional forms of employment are overrepresented in the platform’s user base, due to hours flexibility and low entry-barrier recruitment process. The number of workers signed up is capped and recruitments are currently closed. Judging from complaints made on review websites, it is likely due to the low supply of tasks. Foulefactory users are thus likely to work on several platforms.

Because the main arena for voicing grievances is a corporate-run and moderated worker forum, workers' capacity to build collective action is very limited. The forum reportedly bans dissatisfied users calling for strikes<sup>10</sup>.

The platform also advertises its workers as a “crowd” (*foule*) hired on-demand to execute low skilled tasks for corporate clients, in order to relieve more skilled employees within the client organization from menial tasks. One can question the effect of this approach of labor-division on the workers professional identity. This warrants further investigation (workers interviews).

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10 Ibid.

<b>iAdvize (client) / Ibbü (worker)</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.iadvize.com/fr/">https://www.iadvize.com/fr/</a> <a href="https://www.ibbu.com/">https://www.ibbu.com/</a>
<b>Category:</b> Microwork	<b>Cluster :</b> 1 Crowdwork	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p>iAdvize was founded in 2010 in France and presents itself as follows :</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"The only conversational platform to associate the best of humans and artificial intelligence to optimize client experience" (homepage) "Ibbü is a service powered by iAdvize. It consists in giving brands access to a community of savvy enthusiasts experts in a specific topic (sports, cooking, gardening, video games, etc.) to provide their visitors with customer service when their professional agents are not available, in the evening and at weekends." (– glossary)<sup>11</sup></i></p> <p>The platform consists of two websites: Ibbü on the worker side and iAdvize for clients. This two-portal structure is not uncommon for microwork platforms, as it allows to manage efficiently the two sides of their market.</p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>The specificity of this platform lies in the fact that workers are expected to display a high level of skills. The platform offers an API-based on-demand specialized customer service and customer support. Although required to perform specialized tasks, workers are not really recognized as such and this obviously affects their representation of their own professional identity.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>Workers are in charge of customers' livechat (small window that pop up on brand websites) where they answer customer questions and generate sales. The duration of the job depends on the quantity of sales and/or interaction "goals" set by the client company. These gigs are probably relatively limited in time. iAdvize markets the service as "a complement" to the clients' usual customer service staff, and as a way to maintain service continuity during "atypical" work hours (evening, week-end, vacations).</p>		
<b>Required skill-set:</b>		
<p>To work on Ibbü, workers are required to possess in-depth knowledge of a specific domain (tourism, fashion, cooking etc...), which the platform verifies through surveys. Communication skills and ability to sell products is an implicit but major requirement.</p>		
<b>Business model:</b>		

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.iadvize.com/en/glossary/ibbu/>

The client pays to use iAdvize, and workers are paid by Ibbü based on sales they generate.

**Location:**

Ibbü is available in several countries, and tasks allocation can be country-based.

**Services provided:**

The platform doesn't seem to provide any training nor services for the workers.

**Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

**Worker status:**

Workers seem to be considered as “users”. The sign-up page states that they need to be able to be business owners (more likely auto or micro-entrepreneurs) according to French law, which implies a “self-employed” legal status. As with many platforms requiring this type of status, such legal definition could be challenged, because of the absence of direct worker-client communication and of worker’s inability to negotiate their own rates. In France, previous rulings suggest that this kind of economically dependent self-employed work may constitute grounds to declare false self-employment status.

We didn’t find any evidence of worker-worker interactions. For this a more thorough investigation might be needed (workers interview, etc.).

**Working environment:**

Though experience acquired on the platform may be helpful in related domains and to apply for customer service jobs in general, workers are on-demand “users ” interacting solely through an automated API doesn’t seem to be conducive to them building their own client base—which constituted one of the tenants of self-employment. Whether career evolution is possible via the platform is unclear.

<b>Roamler</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.roamler.com/">https://www.roamler.com/</a>
<b>Category:</b> combination	<b>Cluster :</b> 1 Crowdfwork	<b>Status:</b> for-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p><i>"Roamler provides businesses with B2B crowdsourced solutions, answering the call of companies for efficiency with widespread, on-demand professionals and individuals. These "Roamlers" are recruited, trained, and organized according to their skills, experience, and location, and then matched to "tasks" (– linkedin page )<sup>12</sup></i></p> <p>Roamler was Founded in 2011 in the Netherlands and is split in three parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roamler retail: where tasks consist in visiting in shops and taking picture of specific products, talking to the staff, installing merchandising equipment, or act as a sales representative in order to subsequently give feedback to brands.</li> <li>• Roamler tech (only in the Netherlands, UK and Ireland): a home-device installation service (wi-fi, smart home tech, security devices, etc.)</li> <li>• Roamler care (Netherlands only): a caregiver service</li> </ul> <p>This desk analysis, as well as our database entry, focuses on Roamler retail.</p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>This platform supplies geographically-sticky, hyper-local, tasks-based gigs (other platforms in the crowdwork cluster usually are non-geographically sticky /remote ones).</p> <p>Roamler also plays a very active role in the production process by handling client interactions (workers cannot directly contact clients), dispatching work and fixing rates. This raises questions regarding workers' status as independents contractors.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>Workers are given instructions by clients, and have a limited time-span (2h) to complete the task. They must physically go to the designated retail shop to carry it out. Once completed, they submit the task and are paid following client validation. If the store interferes with the task (For instance, if the staff won't let the worker take pictures), Roamler support must be contacted. The number of tasks that can be accepted at the same time depends on workers on ranking system (level 1 = 1 task, level 2 = 2 tasks and so on). The "insight" retail tasks (pictures, mystery shopping) are of short duration, however the sales and merchandising ones can be more time-consuming and require the worker to visit several venues. In this case the task is more of a "mission".</p>		

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/company/roamler>

**Required skill-set:**

No particular skills are required for "insight"-type tasks, but workers need to have a background in sales to access merchandising and sales tasks.

Some basic training about understanding client instructions (retail terminology, etc.) and successful task completion (photographs requirements, etc.) is provided by the platform.

In areas with high worker density, registration is invite-only .

**Business model:**

The platform controls prices and remuneration. Income increases the more tasks a worker performs on the platform.

**Location:**

Roamler operates in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Poland, Turkey and Chile. The FAQ states that Roamler retail workers can work in any of these countries regardless of their country of registration.

Workers operate away from home, but "insight"-type task are rather discreet, when not explicitly incognito (for mystery shopping for instance, behaving like a regular customer is part of the job description).

**Services provided:**

No service to workers is mentioned by the platform apart from basic task-completion training. No insurance is provided and Roamler denies all responsibility in the event of an accident happening during the task :

*"Roamler is not liable for any damage that the Contractor has suffered in any manner in connection with the use of Roamler and/or in connection with the Jobs provided to the Contractor by Roamler, unless the damage is a direct result of intent or gross negligence on the part of Roamler.*

1. *The Contractor indemnifies Roamler against claims against Roamler on account of damage that has arisen during the performance of the Job, to the extent that such damage is a result of the performance of the Job by the Contractor.*
2. *The Contractor must take out adequate insurance themselves. " (– "legal" page)<sup>13</sup>*

**Status, bargaining power and labor organization:****Worker status:**

Workers are either "users" of the platform, or self-employed "contractors" (in the case of "Roamler pro"). Workers accounts are automatically deactivated after 4 months of inactivity.

**Working environment:**

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.roamler.com/en/legal/terms-conditions>



We noted the presence of a feature allowing workers to add one another as "friends" on the platform. This seems to imply that they can interact with each other. However, access to the platform or interviews with workers would be needed to evaluate the actual extent of these interactions—it seems unlikely that workers are able to communicate in-person as they are geographically dispersed. While we may associate the geographical stickiness of a job with increased inter-worker organization, that doesn't seem to be the case here.

This type of workforce management, where the platform controls the tasks distribution and price, while preventing worker-client interactions, raises questions as to the coherence of their legal status as non-salaried workers.

### Additional notes & Figures:



**"Thanks to the app I am able to afford all those little pleasures of life. I get to treat myself more often, guilt-free"**

- Olivia - Roamler in London



Screenshot 1: Roamler as a source of complementary income (featured comment on platform's homepage)

## Cluster 2: Local consumer-oriented services

<b>Coopcycle</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://coopcycle.org">https://coopcycle.org</a>
<b>Category:</b> On-demand personal services	<b>Cluster :</b> 2 Local consumer-oriented services	<b>Status:</b> Cooperative
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<i>"CoopCycle is a federation of bike delivery co-ops. Governed democratically by coops, it enables them to stand united and to reduce their costs thanks to resources pooling. It creates a strong bargaining power to protect bikers' rights."</i> (homepage) <sup>14</sup>		
Coopcycle is a French platform founded in 2016, following a wave of protests. It currently features 28 platforms and provides them with a common app interface and digital infrastructure.		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
Coopcycle is one of the few cooperative structures in the SWIRL database. It is remarkable because of the legal status of their workers, who are recognized as long-term employees. This challenges the assumption that all workers in on-demand platforms are "self-employed".		
It is also relevant for the analysis of how workers create collective identities and organize industrial action, since the platform explicitly claims to be a political organization as well.		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
Food-delivery via an app provided by Coopcycle.		
<b>Required skill-set:</b>		
Required skills include being able to ride a bike and to efficiently navigate through a city. These skills are usually developed through work experience on other on-demand delivery platforms, since many if not all the workers of federated cooperatives were previously on "big tech" delivery platforms. As far as cooperative workers are invited to contribute to the app development (and they receive specific IT training) software development may be considered, if not a required skill, a competency that workers are encouraged to develop while working with Coopcycle.		
<b>Business model:</b>		
The federation of cooperatives is funded mostly through workers' and restaurants' contributions (see Screenshot 1 for details). Workers receive a monthly salary.		

<sup>14</sup> <https://coopcycle.org/en/>

**Location:**

The federated platforms are located mainly in Western Europe (Screenshot 2). There is also one in Poland and one in Quebec. Each platform operates on a city scale.

The missions take place in the public space. It might be interesting to observe how the cooperatives manage risks associated with bike delivery (Are they using GPS systems designed for cars like in other bike delivery platforms? Is there specific instructions as to limit accidents?).

**Services provided:**

The main service provided by Coopcycle to its workers is the app interface (licensed only to platforms following a cooperative model). The site also mentions a “Juridical toolbox” as well as training in software development. Each federated platform may provide additional services.

Being employees, workers also benefit from the benefits associated with their status, depending on their country (healthcare, insurance, paid leaves etc...)

**Status, bargaining power and labor organization:****Worker status:**

In order to join Coopcycle, all platforms have to adopt a cooperative model where riders 1) are formally employed and 2) contribute to the platform governance.

**Working environment:**

These platforms are also workers collectives, having chosen to leave “big tech” platforms rather than attempting to reform them.

**Additional notes & figures:****HOW DOES IT WORK?**

We follow the French social security motto: "To each according to their means, to each according to their needs!"

**Funding: against the capitalist rentier effect, we contribute!**

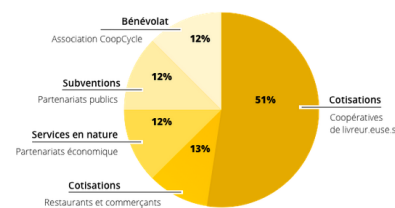
The pooled services are funded by cotisation. The cotisation rate and the funds gathered are democratically managed by members. Thus, the couriers get back the control over their professional activity and working tools.

**A democratic governance**

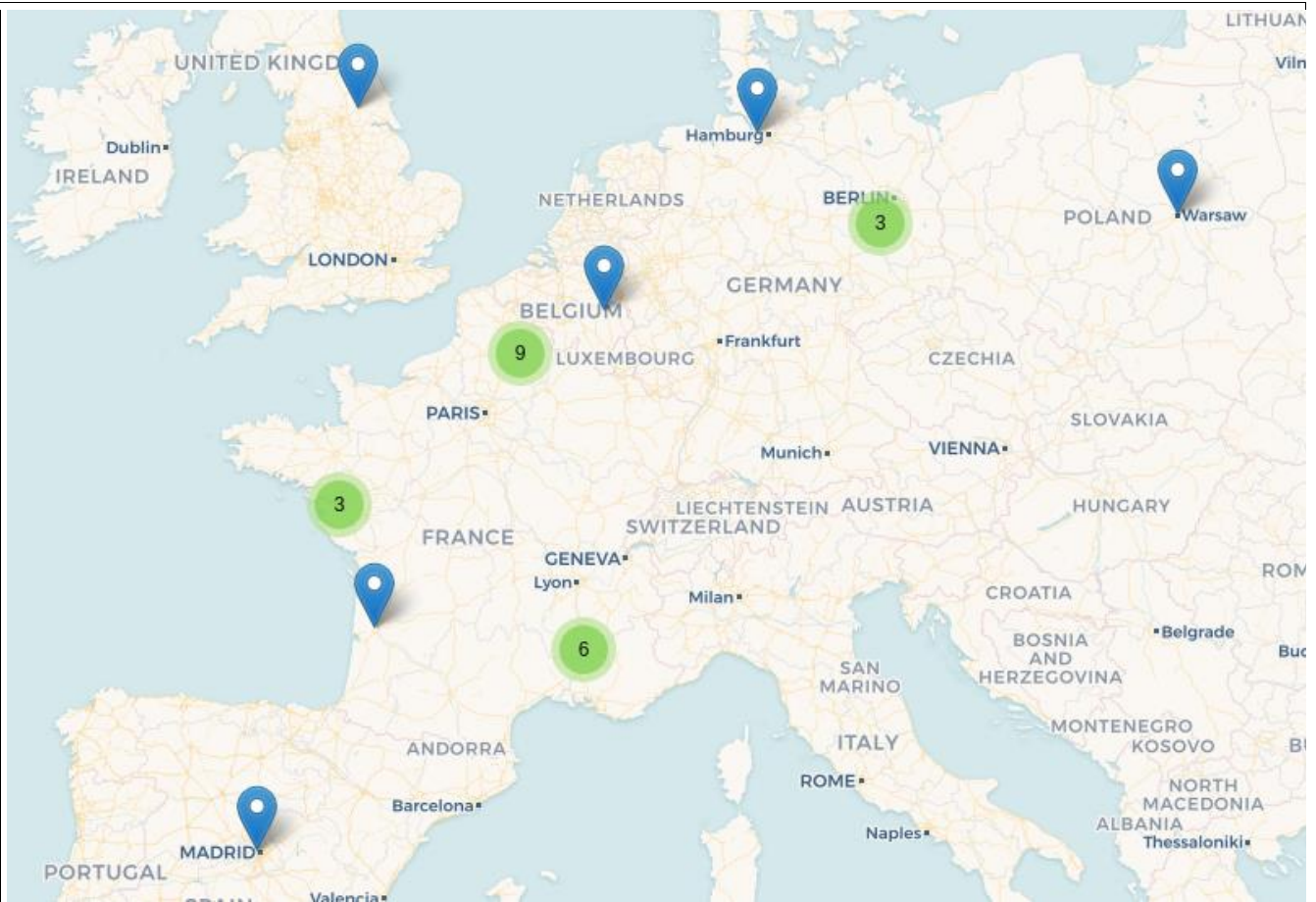
Couriers decide together about:

- The contribution's level of everyone according to its juridical status (cooperative, association, institutional entity)
- The funds allocation
- The pay scheme to provide services

The cooperative status for CoopCycle members enforces as well a democratic governance at the local level.



Screenshot 1: Coopcycle's economic model



Screenshot 2: Federated cooperatives map

<b>Heetch</b>		<b>URL:</b> <i>https://www.heetch.com/</i>
<b>Category:</b> On-demand	<b>Cluster :</b> 2 Local consumer-oriented services	<b>Status:</b> For-Profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p>Heetch is an on-demand cab-hailing app founded in France in 2013. It started off as a ride-sharing platform targeting young people and was centered on night rides. This original status was called into question in a 2016 lawsuit revealing that drivers had started using the platform more as an on-demand ride app than as a ride-sharing one. This was suggested by the growing number of fares done per night, and fare rate calculation tools (depending on time and distance, similar to taxis)<sup>15</sup>. Heetch argued that they considered the service to be "a supplement to public transportation" and that the drivers' income (limited to €6000/year at the time) was only meant to cover car maintenance costs<sup>16</sup>. Heetch lost the lawsuit, and the platform was temporarily closed. It re-opened in 2017, this time as a full-time, licensed self-employed vehicle for hire service.</p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>Heetch is highly involved in the work management processes. To perform gigs, workers are required to download and access a mobile application which contains fare instructions and payment validation tools. This challenges the worker's definition as "independent contractors". This uncertainty has been demonstrated by the 2016 lawsuit, giving way to subsequent changes in workers' status.</p> <p>Compared to other platforms studied in our cluster 2, Heetch's price architecture also stands out: workers are paid for each ride rather than receiving a stable monthly revenue (opposed to Helping and Coopcycle, but similar to Prontopro and Rover). As drivers need to secure a sufficient amount of rides to reach a living wage, they often use several platforms simultaneously. Mentions of such multi-homing can be observed on drivers' online forums, where user profiles are tagged with the name of several platform they work for. Forum users explicitly advise newcomers to use more than one platform<sup>17</sup>.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		

15 Alix, C., 2016. *Procès Heetch : «Un Chauffeur Qui Fait 10-12 Courses Dans La Soirée Fait-Il Du Covoiturage ?»*. [online] Libération.fr. Available at: <[https://www.liberation.fr/futurs/2016/12/09/proces-heetch-un-chauffeur-qui-fait-10-12-courses-dans-la-soiree-fait-il-du-covoiturage\\_1534208](https://www.liberation.fr/futurs/2016/12/09/proces-heetch-un-chauffeur-qui-fait-10-12-courses-dans-la-soiree-fait-il-du-covoiturage_1534208)> [Accessed 7 May 2020].

16 Ebenstein, R., 2016. Heetch Au Tribunal : "On N'est Pas En Concurrence Avec Les Taxis", Assure Le Cofondateur De L'application. [online] Franceinfo. Available at: <[https://www.franceinfo.fr/france/greve-des-taxis/ouverture-du-proces-des-dirigeants-de-l-application-heetch\\_1958161.html](https://www.franceinfo.fr/france/greve-des-taxis/ouverture-du-proces-des-dirigeants-de-l-application-heetch_1958161.html)> [Accessed 7 May 2020].

17 Uberzone. 2018. *Utilisation De 2 Applications VTC En Même Temps*. [online] Available at: <<https://uberzone.fr/threads/utilisation-de-2-applications-vtc-en-meme-temps.8170/>> [Accessed 7 May 2020].

**Job type:**

Here's how the platform presents drivers' "missions"<sup>18</sup>:

- The driver receives a call with a destination, route, and price, and has a limited time to answer. If the timer reaches 0, or if the driver refuses the ride, their "acceptance rate" is negatively affected—except when the ride is +10min long, in which case it can be refused without consequences. (This last detail implies that, unlike regional or national car-sharing services, Heetch is made for shorter rides.)
- The driver reaches the meeting point and confirms on the app once the client is in the car. Drivers can cancel the ride if the client is more than 5min late, intoxicated or displays a threatening behavior, but not based on other criteria (eg. payment method).
- Once the destination is reached, the driver can rate the client and leave a comment. The client also rates the driver, as is usually the case on on-demand platforms.

It should be noted that this type of gig requires a considerable investment as drivers are supposed to pay their car, their phone, their license. This makes sense if driving for car-hailing services is a worker's main activity and primary source of income.

**Required skill-set:**

The most obvious skills required to work on this platform is being able to drive and being able to navigate the city. However, these practical skills aren't the only ones to matter in this line of work. In a study about Uber, Glöss notes that compared to "classic" taxi services, on-demand app drivers are expected to interact with clients, and are pressured to do so by the rating system:

*"Our passengers also talked extensively about the social aspects of the journey experience. In this, the perceived insociability of the taxi driver was to be taken for granted [...] However, there were much higher expectations with Uber drivers - small talk seems to be an expected part of the Uber journey. The passenger could decide whether to engage with the social interaction, but passengers had extra rights to be critical of drivers' conversations."* (Glöss, McGregor and Brown, 2016)<sup>19</sup>

We could expect the same thing to happen with Heetch drivers since they are also subjected to a rating system, and maybe even more so due to Heetch's marketing image as "young and friendly" service. The fact that Uber introduced a (controversial) "quiet mode" (user can choose limited interaction with driver during the ride) also goes to show that this is, by default, assumed to be a part of the job<sup>20</sup>.

**Business model:**

The platform sets the price, starting from a minimum of €7 per ride, to which they add a rate per minute and per kilometer (the amount of this rate depends on cities). Passengers can pay drivers cash or through the app—in this case, drivers receive their payment weekly.

18 heetch. n.d. *tutorial*. [online] Available at: <<https://training.heetch.com/>> [Accessed 7 May 2020].

19 Glöss, M., McGregor, M. and Brown, B., 2016. Designing for Labour : uber and the on-demand mobile workforce. Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, [online] pp.1632-1643. Available at: <<https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/2858036.2858476>>.

20 Sini, R., 2019. 'Shut Up And Drive': Uber's Quiet Option For Silent Rides. [online] BBC News. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-48315229>> [Accessed 17 May 2019].

**Location:**

According to their website, Heetch operates in France, Belgium, Algeria and Morocco. Previous press articles suggest that at some point it also operated in Milan and Stockholm<sup>21</sup>. Heetch rides can create controversy as to the roads drivers are allowed to use. In France for example, vehicles for hire (VTC) app drivers are not allowed to use bus lanes and taxi parking spots, or to drive around cities to find clients on the spot (cruising)<sup>22</sup>.

**Services provided:**

Services provided to workers include a brick-and-mortar meeting place in Paris (Heetch Café). The venue is open Mon-Fri and seems to be run by the platform itself. Worker benefits include discounts on various car-related services, legal assistance to avoid losing driving license "points", car rental, as well as special rates on cab-specific professional training (provided by third parties), banking services, accounting tools, insurance and a driver-oriented blog providing online resources.

**Status, bargaining power and labor organization:****Worker status:**

In France, drivers are considered self-employed and have to pass an exam to obtain a vehicle for hire (VTC) license. Fake VTC licenses are a recurring problem, and measures to limit fraud is one of the grievances that VTC unions have. In 2019, 3,000 Heetch accounts had to be deactivated following the implementation of a new type of license to prevent forgery<sup>23</sup>.

**Working environment:**

In France, platform drivers built several unions (SCP-VTC, FO-capa VTC, CFDT VTC/Lotis, SETP) and associations (Actif VTC and VTC de France) to demand better working conditions. They also built an online forum (Uberzone) which gathers drivers from several platforms as well as some taxi drivers. National unions seem generally supportive of these workers and advocate for their reclassification as platform employees. Taxi unions however, are more ambiguous: they are critical of the platforms, but also ambivalent about the VTC drivers' legal status. According to the website of CGT-taxis (a union for traditional taxi drivers), for instance, "VTCs complain about precariousness and therefore wish to have the same rights as us, but without complying with the obligations associated with [traditional] taxis"<sup>24</sup>.

No information about drivers' career is available. Though they are allowed to build a regular clientele, it seems difficult for drivers to get rid of platforms altogether (although some drivers aspire to, and

21 Boussard, A., 2018. *Heetch Prend Un Nouveau Virage*. [online] leparisien.fr. Available at: <<http://www.leparisien.fr/economie/heetch-prend-un-nouveau-virage-03-03-2018-7588134.php>> [Accessed 7 May 2020].

22 Braquilanges, M. de, 2019. *Taxi Ou VTC: Comment Choisir?*. [online] Legalstart.fr. Available at: <<https://www.legalstart.fr/fiches-pratiques/chauffeur-rtc-transport/vtc-taxis/>> [Accessed 7 May 2020].

23 Foulon, A., 2019. Comment Des Milliers De Chauffeurs VTC Roulent Grâce À De Faux Documents. [online] leparisien.fr. Available at: <<http://www.leparisien.fr/economie/comment-des-milliers-de-chauffeurs-rtc-roulent-grace-a-de-faux-documents-06-09-2019-8146560.php>> [Accessed 7 May 2020].

24 Cgt-taxis.fr. 2019. *Rapport De L'IGAS Et LOM : Vers Une Nouvelle Injustice ?*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.cgt-taxis.fr/22-02-2019-lom-igas-injustice/>> [Accessed 7 May 2020].



online resources are available on how to proceed<sup>25</sup>). Heetch doesn't mention any platform-based ranking or reputation tool for drivers. Despite the fact that drivers are considered independent contractors (as they hold a VTC license), they are not required to own an already-established business before joining Heetch (they are supposed to fulfill the legal requirement to be considered an independent business under French law before beginning to offer rides though). Unlike platforms that targets established professionals like Prontopro or Houzz, here drivers can start working without having previous experience, as long as they hold the license.

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25 Janssens, R., 2019. VTC : Comment Arrêter De Travailler Avec Les Applications ?. [online] youtube. Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tsCzEV\\_i2A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tsCzEV_i2A)> [Accessed 7 May 2020].

<b>Helping</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.helping.com/">https://www.helping.com/</a>
<b>Category:</b> On-demand Personal services	<b>Cluster :</b> 2 Local consumer-oriented services	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p><i>"Customers can book a vetted and insured cleaner and gain back free time within a couple of clicks. For service providers, the platform makes it easier than ever to access new clients and to manage when and where they want to work."</i> (Helping linkedin profile, n.d.)<sup>26</sup></p> <p>Helping is a home cleaning platform founded in 2014 in Germany. It operates in 200 cities and claims 10,000 workers worldwide<sup>27</sup>.</p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>The decision to include Helping in the desk analysis is twofold :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* First, it seems a good illustration of a particular kind of on-demand service platform that emphasizes safety, trust and legal compliance as their main marketing arguments (Screenshot 1);</li> <li>* Secondly, it favors durable worker-client relationships (Screenshot 2).</li> </ul> <p>According to Florian Schmidt (Schmidt, 2017), safety and trust concerns are common in home-cleaning platforms, due to the fact that the job requires access to clients' private sphere (sometimes without their presence).</p> <p>The platform complies with local labor laws of the countries where it operates. As such, Helping's activities and working conditions differ significantly from one country to another.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>In Germany, the platform includes not only cleaning gigs but also other services such as dog-walking, gardening, errands or furniture assembling. The workers are self-employed with a "<i>Geweberschein</i>" (trade license). Service is limited to home cleaning and ironing both in Italy and France, but workers' status is different: in Italy, they are described as "independent janitors" (<i>addetti alle pulizie indipendenti</i>); in France, they are employed by one of the several partner companies (see bellow).</p>		
<b>Required skill-set:</b>		
<p>"Missions" are low-skilled, but as the platform seems to put a particular emphasis on trust, communication between workers and clients may play a bigger role than in other services of this kind. For example, client reviews often emphasize amiability, which hints that communication and sift skills are required for Helping workers. These skills are verified through a survey in Italy and through an interview with the future employer in France. In Germany, there is no skill evaluation process, but</p>		

26 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/helping>

27 helping. n.d. *Helping Apply Page*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.helping.co.uk/apply>> [Accessed 30 April 2020].

workers are encouraged to upload a criminal record certificate. This step is not mandatory, but since it is displayed on workers' profiles, not doing it may dissuade potential clients.

**Business model:**

In Italy and Germany, workers set the price and Helping charges a fee on their rate. In France on the other hand, since workers are considered as formal employees, they earn a monthly salary.

**Location:**

Countries of operation include United Arab Emirates, Australia, Germany, France, Netherlands, Italy, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Switzerland.

For the purpose of the desk analysis, we've only looked at Germany, Italy and France, but this comparison already shows considerable variations in the workers legal status, which suggests that the platform complies with and adapts to local labor laws.

Worker-oriented marketing also appears to adapt to countries: in Germany, Helping emphasizes the alleged benefits of being an independent contractor (Screenshot 3) while in France the platform highlights the stability provided by a permanent contract as well as the fact that it spares workers from dealing with the administrative process of requesting a self-employed ("auto-entrepreneur") status (Screenshot 4).

Inside each country, workers are matched with clients on a city basis, the work itself takes place in the client's place of domicile. As mentioned above, this access to a client's private sphere informs the client-oriented marketing, overemphasizing safety and trust.

**Services provided:**

Helping provides workers with a liability insurance. In France, since workers are formally employed, they also have access to standard employees benefits. Additionally, clients have to provide equipments needed to perform the work (cleaning products and tools), unlike workers from delivery or driver services who usually need to acquire their own equipment.

**Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

**Worker status:**

Status varies: workers are considered independent contractors in Germany and Italy, while in France, sign-up page claims that they are employed by partner companies.

However, all French worker profiles featured on the website mention an that they are "auto-entrepreneurs" (self-employed), so both situations may exist on the platform even though workers' sign-up page only mention the employee type.

**Working environment:**

Schmidt notes that the need for durable client-worker relationships "*makes the platforms for cleaning services particularly vulnerable to getting sued for misclassification of the workers.*" (Schmidt, 2017)<sup>28</sup> citing handy.com as an example of such lawsuits. Helping itself was sued for misclassification in the Netherlands<sup>29</sup>. The court ruled that there was no employment relationship but that charging a fee on

28 Schmidt, F. A. (2017). Digital labour markets in the platform economy. Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung.



29 Lexology.com. 2019. Online Platform Helping Is Not Allowed To Charge Any Commission To

the workers was illegal. This lawsuit was initiated by a union, however it is unclear whether the union workers were working for the platform, or if the union sued the platform out of general concern for breach of labor laws. The use of companies as intermediaries in France may be aimed at avoiding this kind of lawsuit.

It can be assumed that workers are allowed to constitute a network of regular clients outside the platform, given the degree of the client-worker interaction.

### Additional notes & Figures:

#### Helping vs le marché noir

	 Marché noir	 Helping
Réduction d'impôt : 50% des sommes engagées	×	✓
Une assurance en cas de dégâts : des prestataires couverts par une assurance responsabilité civile	×	✓
Réservation en quelques jours : jusqu'à 72h avant la prestation	×	✓
Continuité des prestations : remplacement assuré en cas d'absence ou d'insatisfaction	×	✓
Service client : disponible par téléphone 5 jours par semaine de 9h à 17h	×	✓
Paiement en ligne sécurisé : paiement par prélèvement, carte bancaire ou Paypal	×	✓
Prise en charge de la paperasse : factures et attestation fiscale disponibles en ligne	×	✓
Sélection des aides-ménagères : plusieurs entretiens physiques et téléphoniques	×	✓

Screenshot 1: Helping vs the blackmarket (sic)



Aboubakary D.

"J'ai des clients qui m'envoient des SMS pour me remercier et me féliciter sur la qualité du travail fait. Certains m'ont envoyé des messages pour les fêtes."

[Voir son profil](#)

Screenshot 2: Featured worker's comment

## Flexibel arbeiten, flexibel leben.

Entscheiden Sie selbst, wo und wann Sie arbeiten und wie viel Sie verdienen.

- ✓ Komplette Flexibilität
- ✓ Preise selbst bestimmen
- ✓ Persönlicher Ansprechpartner

Das können Sie verdienen ▼

[Angebote ansehen](#)

Screenshot 3: German version promoting the "flexibility" given by the independent status



### La sécurité d'un emploi déclaré

Travaillez en tant qu'aide-ménagère chez un particulier sans avoir à effectuer les démarches pour devenir auto-entrepreneur en évitant le travail au noir, pratique punie par le code du travail.



### Les avantages d'un contrat à durée indéterminée

Bénéficiez de revenus mensuels fixes, d'une mutuelle mais aussi des congés payés et d'un accompagnement personnalisé de la part de votre employeur.

<b>Prontopro</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.prontopro.it/">https://www.prontopro.it/</a>
<b>Category:</b> On-demand	<b>Cluster :</b> 2 Local consumer-oriented services	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p>Prontopro was founded in Italy in 2015 and claims to have 500,000 clients and 250,000 signed-up workers. Its activities span over 500 different sectors, from construction to more atypical domains like astrology, cosmetic surgery, bodyguarding and private investigation. It also offers jobs usually found on freelancer platforms, such as web design jobs. These professionals interact with clients through a cost estimation system (detailed bellow).</p> <p>The platform mainly advertise itself as an extra security layer between the clients and the workers: their Linkedin profile reads :</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"We are bringing transparency and meritocracy to a world that is completely opaque, and transforming the way people buy services in the process."<sup>30</sup></i></p> <p>This transparency is supposedly due to the quote and the review systems. Worker-wise, the platform claims to be a source of new clients for professionals.</p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>This platform is an example of on-demand services platforms that targets professionals (independent contractors and companies). It allocates gigs via a “quote system” that is reminiscent of a bid-based system in place on platforms such as Upwork. This differentiates Prontopro from free-registration, "classified ads"-type on-demand platforms like Rover that offers the same type of services but attracts different types of workers.</p> <p>As it appears in Figure 5, Prontopro is closer to a cluster 1 platform than to other consumer-oriented ones selected for these desk analysis. It is notable that the platform shares similarities with Houzz, which is also professional-oriented, offers consumer services, is geographically sticky and operates in related sector.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>Clients post gigs on the website, professionals give a cost estimations (it is unclear whether they can see other workers' quotes or not). The client then accepts offers based on quotes and on worker's profile reviews.</p> <p>As mentioned above, activities are very diverse (+500 categories) and unfortunately there is no available estimation of the number of offers or workers present in each categories. Still, in most</p>		

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/company/prontopro>

categories gigs are mission- or project-based, and they constitute the workers' main activity although arguably not their primary income source, as it seems workers rely on several platforms to make a living. This platform seems to be a way for established professionals to add clients to their network, more than a serviceable tool for building a sustainable business. Since the profiles are not publicly available, it is hard to determine how much of their income workers earn on this platform.

Some categories also include gigs typically found on online freelancers platforms, such as graphic design jobs. Unfortunately, due to the lack of access to workers profiles, we could not compare them to those of freelancer platforms.

#### **Required skill-set:**

The required skill level vary with the gigs. Given that Prontopro targets professionals, proper training and professional experience is expected.

Although it provides a worker-oriented online blog, Prontopro doesn't seem to offer training for workers, The blog doesn't focus on practical or legal aspects of the professions present on the platform, and appears to consist mostly of advertisement and generic economic news.

#### **Business model:**

Workers pay to send cost estimates to a client. If the client doesn't read the offer, the worker gets their money back. We can assume the existence of some mechanisms to incite clients to click on and read requests. Only up to five professionals can give a quote for each gig offer. The client then pays the worker (possibly outside the platform, but this is not mentioned explicitly). No fees is taken off that final payment.

#### **Location:**

This platform operates in Western Europe (Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Italy and France). The platform seems to function in the same manner in each country. Most of the gigs traded on Prontopro are geographically sticky and take place at the client's place (construction work for instance), or at the worker's place, shop or office (for instance: tattoo artists, surgeons etc).

#### **Services provided:**

There was no mention of services nor insurance provided to the workers.

### **Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

#### **Worker status:**

The platform doesn't manage contracts, which are established directly between workers and clients. The workers are expected to follow country's laws regarding independent contractors or companies.

#### **Working environment:**

As opposed to the other cluster 2/ on-demand platforms, which tend to be useful to seek for gigs , Prontopro seem to be more about giving visibility to already-established workers. Workers, or at least those from geographically sticky lines of business, seem relatively independent from the platform.

This, added to the fact that there seems to be no communication between workers (who appear to be merely competing for work), hints that workers organizing on the basis of affiliation to the platform is unlikely. However on Houzz, a platform similar to Prontopro in many ways, workers actually did protest the platform's data and advertisement policy. As for non-geographically sticky workers , further analysis of their status on the platform would be required to estimate economic dependency from the platform.

**Additional notes & Figures:**

Re: registration on Prontopro for research purposes: as workers pay each time they offer cost estimates on the platform, researchers doing ethnographic work on Prontopro should prevent workers from bidding on their listings.



<b>Rover</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.rover.com/">https://www.rover.com/</a>
<b>Category:</b> On-demand	<b>Cluster :</b> 2 Local consumer-oriented services	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p><i>"Whether you need in-home dog boarding, pet sitting, dog walking, or day care, Rover connects pet owners with dog people who'll treat their pets like family. Rover sitters are your rainy-day-dog-walkers. Your every-day-belly-rubbers. Your tug-of-war players. Your middle-of-the-night-pee-breakers. Because we get it—your dog is family. And when you can't be there, you can trust us to keep your dog happy, healthy, and sweet as ever."</i> (– about page)<sup>31</sup></p> <p>Rover is a pet care service platform founded in 2011 in the USA. It claims 300,000+ workers. It provides services such as dog-walking or pet-sitting, for all sorts of animals except livestock and exotic animals. The platform targets clients too busy to take care of their pets:</p> <p><i>"And for the world travellers, the long-day-at-work-ers, the business-trip jetsetters, the night-shift survivors: We're your people, too."</i> (– about page)</p> <p>The platform emphasizes the genuine enthusiasm and passion of its workers, who are described "dog people" etc. It advertises its workers as "hobbyist".</p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>The second cluster is characterized by a high number of platforms offering consumer-oriented, geographically sticky, low-skill services. Rover is a good illustration of this kind of platforms. Some jobs take place in public spaces, like for Heetch and Coopcycle, and the platform promotes worker retention (encouraging workers to increase prices as they gain experience, or allowing pricing options meant to facilitate building a regular client base).</p> <p>Rover highlights how on-demand consumer services platforms diverge. Even though both Rover and Heetch workers operate in the public space, they do not benefit from similar public visibility. Moreover, the platform also illustrates the existence of "on-demand consumer services" platforms providing mainly a complementary revenue to its workers. It should also be noted that Rover gives a formal framework to an activity that traditionally belongs to the informal economy.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>Missions all revolve around caring for pets. They are split in three categories :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Dog-walking, which takes place in public spaces (~ thirty minutes walks according to FAQ).</li> </ol>		

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.rover.com/about-us/>

2. Pet-sitting: keeping pets at the client's house.
3. Day-care: workers keep client's pets in their own private homes

During these missions, workers are expected to send the clients photographs and fill a report ("logbook") about their interactions with the pet. This is not explicitly presented as a management device though it should be considered one (it allows the client to check whether the worker is doing a proper job, see screenshot 1).

#### **Required skill-set:**

The job mainly requires pet-care skills, usually acquired through owning pets. Some more "advanced" missions require elementary veterinary skills like medication administration, experience with senior or "special needs " pets etc.

Daycare missions require a living space suitable to host pets (spacious, preferably including a garden).

The terms of service indicate that workers are provided with training resources after registration. The platform also maintains a blog posting content relevant to workers, such as advice on how to deal with emergency situations (pets eating toxic items, handling epileptic seizures, etc.).

#### **Business model:**

Both clients and workers pay a commission to the platform.

Workers set and publicly display their rates, clients use an internal search engine to select workers. The platform advises to start around the average prices in a worker's area, with an eventual increase as the worker gains experience and gets good reviews on the platform. A feature allows workers to increase their rates for new clients only, thus favoring returning ones. No minimum income is guaranteed. Rover states that pet-daycare pays twice as the other jobs. Workers are incited to get paid through the website (otherwise, missions are not covered by the platform's insurance policy).

#### **Location:**

Rover operates in the USA, Canada, UK, Germany, Spain, Italy, France, Netherlands and Norway, Sweden. All missions are geographically sticky, but as mentioned above, the place of work may vary .

#### **Services provided:**

Rover provides an insurance that covers issues regarding pet's health as well as damage or injury caused by the pet, including to the caregiver.

### **Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

#### **Worker status:**

Workers' identity is verified by the platform, and, according to the terms of service, Rover submits personal information to a third party providing "background checks".

The only legal status requirements mentioned, which only applies to California, involves having a business license. From browsing workers' profiles, it appears that most of them are students.

Though some daycare providers seem more involved in the platform, none of the profiles observed unequivocally indicates that working on Rover was their main activity.

### **Working environment:**

The skills, job experience and training acquired on the platform may be used to find jobs in pet-related industries, but the platform itself doesn't seem to offer many possibilities in terms of career advancement. However, workers rates may increase as experience builds up and clientele develops.

Direct client-worker interactions may allow building a private client network, but the insurance provided by the platform might act as a motivation to keep using it to mediate the transactions. The fact that many workers are student implies that this is a side activity, performed along their studies. Turnover rates cannot be inferred, but we suspect they might be high.

Some workers have veterinary medicine-related diplomas, which could hint at a certain professionalization, but this is still unclear and warrants more detailed qualitative field work (interviews with workers).

The platform doesn't provide internal forums or meeting places for workers, and we could not find evidences of worker-worker interactions. This being a side-job, workers' collective organization can be irrelevant. Even though it formalize jobs traditionally belonging to the informal economy, the gigs provided on Rover are still for the most part "ghost" and precarious side-jobs.

### **Additional notes & Figures:**

*Vous devez démarrer un nouveau Carnet de bord au moment où le service commence. C'est à dire au début d'une promenade ou au moment où le chien est sous votre garde.*

1. Ouvrez l'appli Rover et appuyez sur **Accueil** en bas de votre écran. (**Sur Android** : appuyez sur l'icône Menu, puis sélectionnez **Accueil**.)

2. Quand vous êtes prêt à commencer un service, sélectionnez **Démarrer**.

3. Pendant le service, prenez une photo et notez tout ce qui se passe en appuyant sur les icônes correspondant aux pauses pipi, crotte, nutrition et hydratation.

**Conseil** : Vous pouvez quitter l'appli et utiliser votre téléphone normalement pendant un service. Le suivi continuera à fonctionner jusqu'à ce que vous appuyiez sur **Arrêter**. Pour rouvrir un service en cours, appuyez sur **Accueil** et sélectionnez **Ouvrir**.

4. Lorsque vous avez terminé, appuyez sur **Arrêter** pour arrêter le minuteur. Pour les visites, appuyez sur Terminer la promenade.

5. Écrivez un message facultatif, passez le Carnet de bord Rover en revue et faites toutes les modifications que vous voulez. Ensuite, sélectionnez **Envoyer** pour l'envoyer au propriétaire.

**Screenshot 1: Description of the logbook feature (no english version available, might be country dependant)**

## Cluster 3: Self-employed working remotely

<b>Avvocatoflash</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.avvocatoflash.it/">https://www.avvocatoflash.it/</a>
<b>Category:</b> on-demand personal service	<b>Cluster:</b> 3 Self-employed working remotely	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p><i>"Avvocato Flash is the Italian legal portal to find and get in touch online with a lawyer, totally free. We help you to find a legal expert in a simple, reliable and fast way."</i> (homepage)<sup>32</sup></p> <p>Avvocatoflash was founded in 2016 in Italy and claims <b>3,517 workers</b>. It allows clients to get invoices from specialized lawyers, and advertises itself as both a freelancer quote comparison tool and a safe intermediary between clients and self-employed lawyers .</p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>In a way, the platform is the online version of a legal staffing agency or of a more traditional law firm, which centralizes important aspects of the job allocation process. Among cluster 3 platforms, it is among the closest to non-platform structures. It deals with both consumer and business clients.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>Clients fill forms explaining their legal requirements, the platform's team hand-picks lawyers in accordance with the request (taking into account each lawyer's specialties and location). Each of the selected lawyers are then asked to provide a quote. The platform's team select three quotes (supposedly based on price). The lawyers that make it through this second round use pre-paid "credits" for the platform to submit their quotes to the client, who chooses one. Finally, the platform puts the lawyer and the client in touch, with no further intervention or additional fee.</p>		
<b>Required skill-set:</b>		
<p>A law degree and being admitted in the bar association are required and vetted by the platform. Avvocatoflash claims that it "selects the best lawyers", but no information regarding this selection process is provided.</p>		
<b>Business model:</b>		
<p>The platform is free for clients and claims to charge no fees to lawyers (which is true, once the contact between client and lawyer is established). However, lawyers need to subscribe to a "monthly credit plan" which allows them to buy tokens which can be spent to send invoices to potential clients. These tokens expire after 30 days, and the subscription plan is automatically renewed.</p>		

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.avvocatoflash.it/>

**Location:**

The platform only operates in Italy and the client-lawyer matching is region-based. Clients and lawyers are supposed to meet in person once they find an agreement.

**Services provided:**

The Avvocatoflash blog mentions online seminars for lawyers.

**Status, bargaining power and labor organization:****Worker status:**

Lawyers are self-employed, buying monthly credits to access a client-sourcing service.

**Working environment:**

A form of dependency to the platform is introduced by the subscription system, and by the fact that lawyers interact with the clients only after the platform intermediates and selects them. In fact, the platform has a strong centralization power regarding the distribution of work. They decide which lawyers interact with which client.

However, this dependency is largely mitigated once the contact is established, since lawyers can add clients met through the platform to their face-to-face client network.

Interviews would be needed to estimate multi-platform use, as well as the extent to which lawyers maintain a client base outside the platform. A further study of lawyer's profiles may also prove useful: what motivates traditionally independent workers to use the platform, given the restricted access to clients (is competition the main factor? is the typical user a young lawyer with no access to a client network?).

<b>Fiverr</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.fiverr.com/">https://www.fiverr.com/</a>
<b>Category:</b> Combination	<b>Cluster:</b> 3 Self-employed working remotely	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p>Fiverr is a generalist on-demand work platform founded in 2010 in Tel Aviv, Israel. It presents itself as “the perfect place to find freelance services for your business”. It is a publicly traded company that operates worldwide. The website is available in English, French, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese. Fiverr advertises itself as an “online marketplace for freelance services”, and is both B2B and B2C. The platform allows to trade almost any service, from web development to tarot reading, to “girlfriend experience” for gamers, to fake likes. Services are divided in 8 categories: Graphic design; Digital marketing; Writing and translation; Video and animation; Music and audio; Programming and tech; Business; Lifestyle.</p> <p>The platform also offers a business oriented “Fiverr pro” section, with an extra level of profile verification. The “pro” status is granted to freelancers who apply for it, based on proof of experience and clients reviews.</p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion :</b>		
<p>The platform is included in the desk analysis mainly as an example of a “combination” platform (it offers both online freelancing tasks and microwork). Moreover, even though it is advertised as a business-oriented platform, it also offers consumer services. Interestingly, within our social space the platform bridges the gap between crowdwork platforms and remote freelance ones. It also serves as an illustration of the remote platforms where workers operate from home and set their own rates.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>Workers advertise services on the platform, usually in the form of a promise (“I will...”), and clients choose depending on their needs. For instance, a web designer posted the following ad on the platform:</p> <p><i>“A designer from 2013. Now working on Fiverr as a Minimalist Designer. Specialized in Minimal logo design with simple yet elegant styles to make your Logo attractive”</i></p> <p>The design of the platform revolves around the idea of a task based work-flow, where tasks are called “gigs”. During the first years of the platform, the maximum rate was limited to \$5 per tasks, as an incentive to encourage freelancers to divide complex projects in simple, actionable tasks. The limit has since been lifted, but the incentives to keep a task-based workflow is still present on the platform. The designer cited above state that “one gig buys you 2 initial concepts (5 revisions), delivered in one day”. One gig is priced at 4,4€, and the number of invoiced gigs increase the more tasks become complex. Due to the very diverse types of gigs advertised on the platform, workers can use Fiverr as both a primary and secondary income source, depending on the tasks offered.</p> <p>We observed instances of re-intermediation: the worker posting the gig acts as a foreman managing a</p>		

network of external microworkers/clickfarmers. For instance, in the digital marketing section, we found an offer stating:

*“I will share your content on my **very active Facebook page** for an audience of 500,000+ Real Ultra Active Users. My page is a daily used page and it is very active. It's **not** a page that was created to publish only ads. So your post will look like a natural post on the page.”* (screenshot 1)

The task is priced at €14.19 and delivered within a day.

#### **Required skill-set:**

Given the broad number of jobs offered, the expected level of skills shown by workers varies a lot. Some freelancing tasks (for instance graphic design or software engineering) require higher skills. All of them require to be able to taskify a project. Some negotiation and communication skills are also required, no matter the gig. Some tasks require unusual skills. For instance, the digital marketing task mentioned above implies that the worker be able to maintain and capitalize on a Facebook-based microwork network.

On Fiverr pro, the expected skills are more traditional, and the platform verifies worker competencies and background.

#### **Business model:**

#### **Location:**

Supposedly, all jobs posted on Fiverr are performed remotely, and are not geographically sticky. Competition among workers widely differs according by context (global south versus global north for instance), which could exert a downward pressure on the rates.

#### **Services provided**

Fiverr offers various training options to its workers. Written online tutorials to develop business management skills are available, spanning various subjects: Subscribing to a private health insurance as a freelancer, tax filing, cash flow management, etc.

The company also organizes face-to-face and online workshops in various cities around the globe. The subjects are also diverse. For instance, at the time we accessed the platform, the top two events highlighted were about “How to use your time for freelancing during Ramadan” and “Build trust within your team, company, customers”.

Fiverr also provides an online forum where users can ask for community support and report technical issues.

#### **Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

#### **Worker status:**



The workers are considered users by the platform. They are therefore subject to the platform's terms of services, which limits listings as well as company liability, etc. Workers' legal status seems to vary depending on the country in which they operate.

### **Working environment:**

Workers on Fiverr benefit from several design decisions made by the platform. Due to the clear intent of the platform to cater to businesses services, listing structure implies some kind of worker-client interaction, even for short-term low-skilled gigs. Moreover, we observed several instances of workers adjusting rates and deadlines following discussion with a client. Although we found numerous mentions of the importance for workers to build a client network in order to be able to earn a sustainable income on the platform, there seems to be no mention of how to leverage such network outside the platform to build a stand-alone business. Several workers did however mention their use of multiple platforms to post listings.

We found fairly active external forums (for instance, [reddit.com/r/fiverr](https://www.reddit.com/r/fiverr/)), as well as lowly moderated internal ones, suggesting some level of worker-worker interaction. Workers on these forums mainly exchange complaints about Fiverr's client-worker mediation processes and tips for increasing one's revenue. However, nothing seems to suggest that this fosters workers' organization. In these forums, workers discuss the impact of "the algorithm" on their own ability to sustain a business on the platform. One worker in particular described consistently winning voice acting gigs on Fiverr, until a change in the ranking system dried out their income source.

We saw a lot of creative workers demoting Fiverr's "taskified jobs" work management process in online forums. Silvio Lorusso, in one of his book's chapter dedicated to Fiverr, suggests that this new "taskified" division of labor goes along a deeper transformation of the creative industry. The exponentially growing information industry requires an integration of focused design processes in its products. He calls the phenomenon "the solubility of design". The split of a complex trade in a series of technical tasks follows this transformation. It should be noted that a lot of creative workers consider the taskification of design to be an oxymoron. In this case, workflow management decisions on the platform's side, emerging as a response to an industry's need, is directly involved in a conflict about the definition of the designers "trade".

### **Additional notes & Figures:**

## About This Gig

I will share your content on my **very active Facebook page** for an audience of 500,000+ Real Ultra Active Users.

My page is a daily used page and it is very active. It's **not** a page that was created to publish only ads. So your post will look like a natural post on the page.

### Why me

1. I will give you proof with a screenshot
2. Brings more traffic to your website or any link share.
3. Real genuine visitor.
4. Promote your Facebook Page, YouTube Channel, Website, Blogs, Videos, Product Link or any other link whatever you want to share on my active page.
5. **100% Customer Satisfaction Guarantee.**

**Contact me if you have any questions. I'm always available to help you.**

**What I Need From You – Your post/advert in link, image or text format.**

**kindly place your order now**

Thank you.

Screenshot 1: Example of listing offerig access to a micro-work external network

<b>Freelancer</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.freelancer.com/">https://www.freelancer.com/</a>
<b>Category:</b> combination	<b>Cluster :</b> 3 Self-employed working remotely	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p>Freelancer was launched in 2009 in Australia and provides services across several categories. According to its homepage, the most popular categories are: Web development, Graphic design, Logo design, Marketing and Mobile application development. Freelancer.com claims to be</p> <p><i>"the world's largest freelancing and crowdsourcing marketplace by total number of users and projects posted. 27 million registered users have posted over 13 million projects and contests to date in over 900 areas as diverse as website development, logo design, marketing, copywriting, astrophysics, aerospace engineering and manufacturing. "</i> (– linkedin profile)<sup>33</sup></p> <p>However, on this kind of platforms, the number of registered users is not representative of the number of active users. According to Schmidt (2017): <i>"The number of active users is always much smaller and follows a "long tail" or Pareto distribution – only a small number of "power-users" (between 1 and 10 per cent) accomplishes the majority of all jobs on the platform. Most users who create an account are active only sporadically or not at all. In order to evaluate the size of a platform, revenue figures or the number of finished jobs are much more significant."</i><sup>34</sup></p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>Freelancer's main feature is probably its diversity in terms of gigs types (Screenshot 1). Indeed, it includes projects, mission and task-based gigs, which explains it being labeled as a "combination" category. Some gigs could be count as microwork, others as freelancing, and some geographically sticky ones could even fall under the on-demand services category. Skill level and client type (B2B and B2C) also vary.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>As stated above, gigs are very diverse in terms of specifications, time, and worker's involvement. Some are task-based (such as fixing a small bug in an app code, changing a logo's background, etc.), some are mission-based (eg., designing a website), some are project-based (eg., longer software development projects). Though most offers seem to be non-geographically sticky, there are also local ones (eg., product photography, merchandise inspection, drone footage...). Among the latter, some are consumer-oriented (grocery shopping, sport trainer...). When workers bid on a gig, they leave a comment for the client to read, in which they try to differentiate their service from other workers' bids.</p>		
<b>Required skill-set:</b>		

33 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/freelancer-com>

34 Schmidt, Florian A. (2017). "Digital labour markets in the platform economy", report (Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung).

Jobs expected skill levels are very diverse, and there is no skill validation process on the platform's part: clients have to decide for themselves if the worker is qualified or not, by reading the comments attached to bids, and examining worker's profiles. For this reason, worker's comments seem to play an important role in convincing the clients to hire them. As such, good writing and communication skills might be crucial to get hired.

#### **Business model:**

A fee is charged on both clients price and workers earnings by the platform (the rate depends on the gig).

A gig's price is established by the client, either by setting it directly or by choosing a worker whose bid correspond to the client's opportunity cost. It can either be a set price for a task//mission or an hourly rate. Contest-type offers in which workers compete to provide the mission/project are also featured on the platform.

Complaints about payment reversals (a situation in which a worker has done a job and been paid, but the payment is subsequently canceled) seem extremely frequent on both freelancer.com forum and on other websites<sup>35</sup> along with complaints about the platform's support service (which doesn't appear to act upon abusive reversal). On a Quora thread a worker asks if anyone else ran into this problem; the CEO of one of freelancer.com's competitor (golance) claims that this problem is due to Freelancer's chargeback policy (Screenshot 2).

#### **Location:**

The platform operates globally, creating a geographically-bound rate competition. The phenomenon is, according to Schmidt, accentuated by the bidding system: *"First, on these outsourcing sites individual contractors have to compete with each other globally, and through the practice of bidding there is the danger of entering a race to the bottom for common tasks. How cheaply one can offer a service depends partly on one's cost of living but more importantly on one's degree of specialization. The more specialised a skill is the less it is in danger of a deterioration in prices caused by global competition. For freelancers in the Global North, it will be less and less profitable to offer services that can be done just as well via the internet by people from the Global South."* (Schmidt, 2017)

Some clients try to discriminate against Indian workers and other English-speaking workers from global South country to participate in bids, by including statements like *"US freelancers only"*, or *"No Indians, please"*<sup>36</sup>.

Most gigs are non-geographically sticky, and workers perform them from home. The local ones take place at a client's place or in public spaces.

#### **Services provided:**

No services are provided to workers. Training comes in the form of detailed resources on freelancer.com's blog, often written by other workers.

#### **Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

35 <https://www.freelancer.com/community/experts/q/how-does-milestone-reversal-affect-you-and-this-site>

36 "karabalsagun ", 2018. *Listen, Young Freelancer!*. [online] Freelancer.com. Available at: <<https://www.freelancer.com/community/articles/listen-young-freelancer-a-freelancer-s-guide-to-protection-from-frauds#>> [Accessed 7 May 2020].

### Worker status:

Workers are considered as “users”, but have contracts with clients in some cases. One of the internal blog article advises workers to never accept work without signing a contract first.

### Working environment:

It seems possible to pursue a career on the platform, some workers seem to have a very long backlog of gigs. However, we should question the frequency of such high achievement rates.(see Schmidt's remark about "power-users" above).

Moreover, the frequent scams and poor support by the platform make building a career solely on elancers.com a risky endeavor. Besides reversal of payment, complaints include frequent plagiarism and competition, thus creating a downward pressure on rates.

### Additional notes & Figures:

Job Title	Duration	Verified	Avg Bid	Bids
Simple PHP Fix - 20 Minutes	6 days left	VERIFIED	\$24	20 bids
Need digital marketer	6 days left		\$300	2 bids
Software Developer.	6 days left		\$20 / hr	7 bids

The screenshot displays three job listings from a freelance platform. Each listing includes a title, duration, a 'verified' status (where applicable), an average bid amount, and the number of bids received. The first job is a 'Simple PHP Fix - 20 Minutes' with a 6-day duration, a verified status, an average bid of \$24, and 20 bids. The second job is 'Need digital marketer' with a 6-day duration, an average bid of \$300, and 2 bids. The third job is 'Software Developer.' with a 6-day duration, an average bid of \$20 per hour, and 7 bids. Each listing also includes a brief description and a list of relevant skills or technologies.

Screenshot 1: Job's duration diversity



Michael Brooks, CEO & Owner of goLance.com, a global freelance workforce without borders

Answered Aug 18 2018 · Author has 1.7k answers and 1.7m answer views


Hi Wasim,

The situation you have just described in your question is a serious challenge for any platform, not just Freelancer dot com.

The “reversed payment” situation is caused by **your client’s credit card chargeback**. Here’s what happens.

You work on a project. Everything runs smoothly. You get paid. You even get a five-star review. Then, one day, out of the blue you realize that the money is missing from your account on Freelancer. **Why?**

Well, for some reason, your client notified his bank that he wants his money back. The chargeback then causes a chain reaction. Your client gets the money from his bank, then the bank gets its money from Freelancer, then Freelancer covers this amount from your available funds.

You want to complain. You did nothing wrong. Unfortunately, the section 21. Chargebacks in [Freelancer’s Terms](#)  says that you can forget about that money. If it is any comfort, your client’s account is going to be closed. But, you still won’t get your money. You can appeal, but you have to wait and hope for the best.

<b>Houzz</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.houzz.fr/">https://www.houzz.fr/</a>
<b>Category:</b> Online freelancing	<b>Cluster :</b> 3 Self-employed working remotely	<b>Status:</b> For-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p>Houzz was founded in 2009 in the USA. It claims to be:</p> <p><i>"The leading platform for home remodeling and design, providing people with everything they need to improve their homes from start to finish."</i> (– Houzz linkedin profile).<sup>37</sup></p> <p>It hosts the portfolios of home designers and interior decorators as well as other house maintenance jobs. However, this professional-oriented platform does not constitute Houzz's main activity. The images generated by workers are arranged by the platform into a picture gallery with a built-in advertisement system that allows users to find and buy furniture similar to that depicted in the pictures displayed. This feature has caused controversy regarding copyright violation claims, that eventually resulted in workers starting a petition against the platform (see below).</p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>This platform is relevant to our study for two main reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First, its specific position inside its cluster, its focus on business-oriented services and the geographical stickiness implied by the nature of its offers place it at the frontier between cluster 3 and cluster 2.</li> <li>• Moreover, the 2018 petition against the platform represents an interesting case of collective action undertaken by platform workers.</li> </ul>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>Workers post photographs in a personal portfolio. Users can browse it freely. Once a client has chosen a professional, they contact them through the platform. From there, professionals handle the client's request just like they normally would without the platform, alternatively they have access to built-in tools (detailed in the "service" section).</p> <p>Providing photos could be considered work in itself, since one of the main purposes of the website, is for clients to "find inspiration" by looking at those pictures. A number of registered users might not be potential clients at all. The value of these photos for the platform is made even more patent by the fact that the gallery features a "visual match search" function that allows users to select a piece of furniture on a photo to get links to affiliate websites to buy similar furniture (Screenshot 1). Besides, by looking at the comments under the pictures, it isn't uncommon for designers to give free advice to users who aren't necessarily potential clients (for instance, where to buy a specific set of furniture, how to clean them etc.). It could then be argued that professionals also provide non-remunerated work for the platform, producing content and advertisement as well as customer service. Noticeably, the</p>		

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/company/houzz>

advertisement features have been met with strong opposition from professionals who deem it abusive, seeing it as a way to encourage clients to try to reproduce the designs on their own, rather than paying a designer (see below).

**Required skill-set:**

The gigs are mostly high-skilled creative projects . They may be long termed and require continuous client-worker interaction.

**Business model:**

Workers pay a subscription to the platform, with different price levels (59\$-179\$), giving access to different services and tools. Workers fix their price and are paid directly by their clients.

**Location:**

Houzz operates in the USA, UK, Australia, Germany, France, Russia, Japan, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, New Zealand, Singapore and India. For each country, client-worker matching seems to be city-based. In order to perform their jobs, workers need to go to the clients' home.

**Services provided:**

The platform doesn't seem to provide any kind of training resources for the workers. However, it provides various services such as website development and marketing tools, a professional photographer service, a business dashboard and a 3D design software. The data collected by these services is also a cause of concern, and are mentioned in the 2018 petition (see below).

**Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

**Worker status:**

The platform presents itself as a mere promotion tools for professional designers. However, as stated above, some elements give reasons to think that workers may be also providing unpaid work to the platform.

**Working environment:**

In 2018, following the implementation of the "visual matching" feature on the website, and the acquisition of another designer platform (IvyMark) by houzz, a collective of designers started a petition<sup>38</sup> against the platform, signed by 2,638 worker. It states:

*" Houzz has evolved and it is now using photos of our interior design projects in a very different way, one that impacts our businesses and our industry. When you started selling products from our room photos, you never asked **us** – the designers of those rooms – for permission. Often those products are lower-priced and inferior to the ones we use in our custom designs, which is not only a misrepresentation of our work and misleading to the consumer, but also may be a violation of copyright[...]Many of us have felt for years that Houzz is not a friend to designers and we do not want our private information about what we do, what products cost, our customers, etc., shared with*

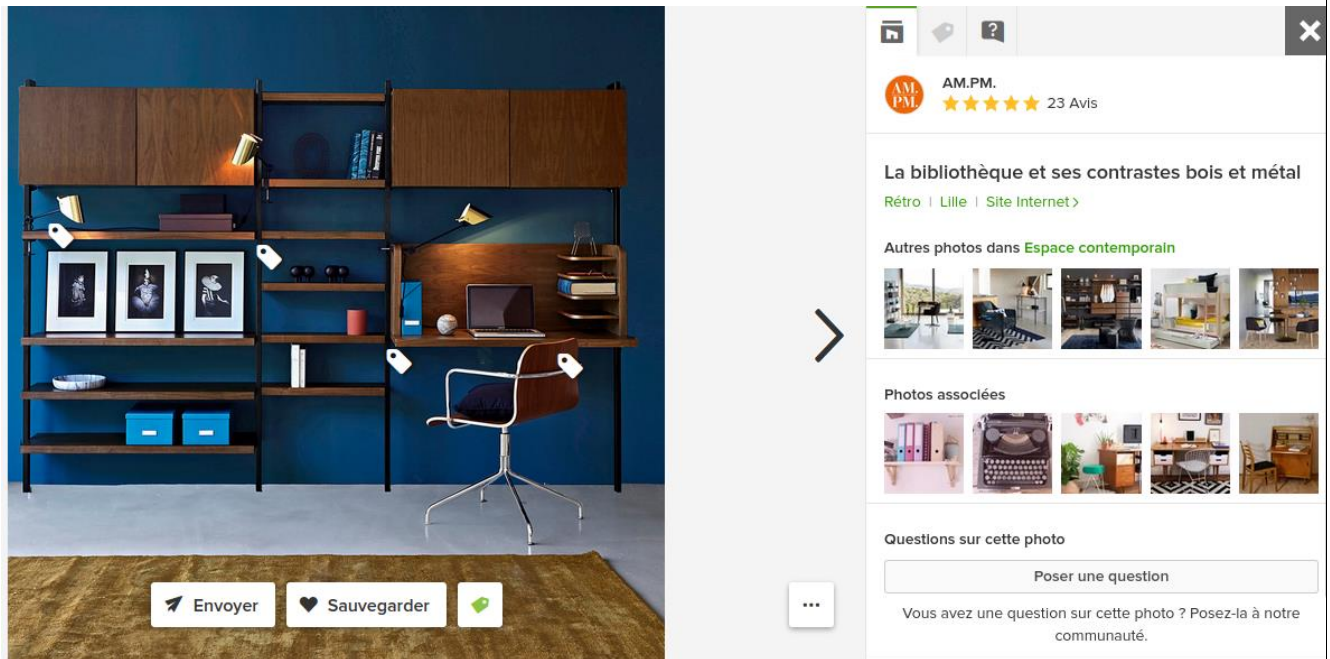
38 Actionnetwork.org. 2018. *A Petition To Stop Houzz From Using Designers To Make Money*. [online] Available at: <<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/a-petition-to-stop-houzz-from-using-designers-to-make-money>> [Accessed 6 May 2020].



*Houzz.* "

It is followed by a series of demands regarding the use of designers' photos and the management of personal data (see screenshot 2) The same year, an update to the platform's terms of use (limiting users' ability to sue the platform) caused a designer who presents herself as "*one of the people responsible for the Houzz Petition*" to call her peers to leave the platform<sup>39</sup> In both of these cases, workers organized online to put out a petition and social medias protests against a specific platform policy.

### Additional notes & Figures:



Screenshot 1: A picture featuring "visual match" tags

39 Laizure, L., 2018. *International Get Off Houzz Day*. [online] interiordesigncommunity. Available at: <<https://www.interiordesigncommunity.com/posts/1671140>> [Accessed 6 May 2020].

- a. **Houzz must immediately stop selling products from designers' images** in all markets in the United States and internationally until an appropriate use license or affiliate agreement between Houzz and the designers and photographers has been negotiated.
- b. **Designers must be allowed to remove their photography** — regardless of how many idea books the work has been shared to — at any time with no consequence to them.
- c. **Houzz must not allow third-party partners to use designers' photos** for any ads or editorial articles without first receiving permission from those designers and/or their photographers.
- d. **If a designer decides to opt-out of using the Houzz platform, their business is not listed or "remembered" by the platform in any way.** They simply won't appear in search results.
- e. If a designer does not choose to buy any additional advertising from Houzz, **they are removed from the Houzz call list permanently.**
- f. If a designer does choose to advertise with Houzz, **they must receive analytics** proving that what they have paid for – namely higher billing in searches in their marketplace – is actually what they are receiving.
- g. **Houzz must seek a designer's permission** before they use a photo of theirs in any online editorial content.

Screenshot 2: Revendications from the 2018 online petition

<b>Upwork</b>		<b>URL:</b> <a href="https://www.upwork.com/">https://www.upwork.com/</a>
<b>Category:</b> Online freelance	<b>Cluster:</b> 3 Self-employed working remotely	<b>Status:</b> for-profit
<b>Platform inclusion:</b>		
<b>Description:</b>		
<p>Upwork is an American platform, founded in San Francisco, California, in 2019, by the fusion of two on-demand labor platforms: Elance and oDesk. The company boasts 12 million registered freelancers, serving 5 millions clients (among which many companies) in 2015<sup>40</sup>. In 2013, the platform saw 6 million gigs posted on its website, for a total amount of transaction approaching \$1 billion<sup>41</sup>.</p> <p>The platform's slogan is "In-demand talent on demand. Upwork is how. Upwork expertly connects professionals and agencies to businesses seeking specialized talent". It attracts high-skilled freelancers (software engineers, designers, writers, sales &amp; marketing, data scientists, architects) and lower-skilled workers, traditionally representing a big part of the internationally outsourced jobs (customer services, call center, support, etc.).</p> <p>Gigs span over 8 categories: "Web, mobile and software dev; Design &amp; creative; Writing; Sales &amp; marketing; Admin support; Customer service; Data science &amp; analytics; Engineering &amp; architecture".</p>		
<b>Desk analysis inclusion:</b>		
<p>Upwork was included in the desk analysis, mainly to get an illustration of the kind of gigs provided by remote, global platforms, offering project-based, high-skilled freelance job. Plus, it is interesting as an example of platforms advertising themselves as ways for on-demand workers to earn a sustainable full-time primary income. The platform also advertises itself as a good alternative to traditional temp agencies for on-demand workers. Moreover, Upwork seems to favor longer projects, sporting minimum durations of 3 to 6 month. Nevertheless, reintermediation is rampant, and a huge chunk of its user base is made up of micro- or clickworkers recruited by high earners.</p>		
<b>Variables description:</b>		
<b>Job type:</b>		
<p>There are two ways in which clients can hire on-demand workers on the platform. Either the clients post a public job offer, for which the workers must "bid" on rates, or the client can directly browse workers' profiles and history to find a suitable candidate. Both ways involve client-worker negotiation, but according to different rules. In the first case, workers compete to offer the lowest rate, then negotiate deadlines and job specifications with the client. In the second case, workers are able to directly negotiate rates, terms and deadlines with the client.</p> <p>Clients and workers rate one another, and leave feedback (comments) on each other profiles. This serves as a two-sided vetting process, as both have access to a backlog of gigs clients recruited for and workers carried out. Through the platform, workers can learn how much was billed to the client for past projects and how much was actually paid. Conversely, clients are aware of how much money</p>		

40 According to a 2015 Techcrunch article : <https://techcrunch.com/2015/05/05/elance-odesk-rebrands-as-upwork-debuts-slack-like-chat-platform/>

41 According to a 2013 Forbes article : <https://www.forbes.com/sites/elainepofeldt/2015/05/05/elance-odesk-becomes-upwork-today-odesk-brand-gets-phased-out/>

workers earned, their ratings, their profile, the number of gigs undertaken and stated hourly rate. The platform seems to focus on long duration gigs, implying a long term client-worker collaboration. Some listings are posted specifically to recruit workers in agency-like structures: Group of workers competing with freelancers on Upwork. For instance, one post we stumbled upon reads:

*“Looking for an experienced social media marketer /media buyer to join my agency, must have experience in the e-commerce niche” (Screenshot 2)*

On Upwork, we also observed some really short duration projects. For instance, one client listed:

*“I need a graphic designer to create thumbnails for my YouTube channels; fixed-price: \$15”*

#### **Required skill-set:**

Overall, the platform advertises itself as a place to hire highly skilled freelancers to fulfill the demand for on-demand workers. The platform vets every new worker profile via phone or online interviews before giving them access to the job marketplace. Nonetheless, we still found evidences of short-timed, low skilled jobs being posted on the platform. Existing literature maintains that Upwork is characterized by reintermediation and “local lengthening of supply chains” — which implies that, when reintermediated and taskified, remote gigs are allocated by top earners to local workers<sup>42</sup>.

The platform distinguishes the highly active and well rated workers with badges. Although some discussion observed in external online forums suggests that these badges were not really relevant when it comes to maintaining a sustainable workload. Workers seem to acknowledge that having a reliable client network, as well as good profile reviews was more important than badges.

#### **Business model:**

The workers pay a fee to the platform upon winning bids or successfully conducting direct negotiations. The commission rate varies between 5 and 20% of the earned amount. Clients can also subscribe to “premium” packages, thus acquiring access to additional services such as “tailored search results featuring Top Rated and Rising Talent” (“Plus” package: \$49.99/month) or a “dedicated team of advisors to get you hiring faster and more successfully” (Business package: \$849/month).

#### **Location:**

The platform operates globally, and only offers remote jobs. Insofar as reintermediation introduces dynamics of local lengthening of supply chains, some more taskified projects have to be construed as geographically bound. As for other global platforms, we expect that global competition for jobs will negatively affect the workers’ wages.

#### **Services provided:**

Upwork provides no services to the workers, apart from “online courses for new freelancers” on how to post a successful profile on the website, and the basics of independent contracting: how to get paid, how to find clients, etc.

#### **Status, bargaining power and labor organization:**

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42 Lehtonvirta, Vili, Hjorth, Isis, Graham, Mark & Barnard, Helena (2015). “Online Labour Markets and the Persistence of Personal Networks: Evidence From Workers in Southeast Asia”, ASA 2015, Chicago, IL.

### Worker status:

As per the user agreement, workers “are an employee or agent of and authorized to act for and bind an independent business (whether it be as a self-employed individual/sole proprietor or as a corporation, limited liability company, or other entity)”. Upwork considers that workers bidding for jobs on its website are “users” of the platform, and therefore subject to a user agreement, with entails no further obligations for the platform itself .

### Working environment:

Overall, external forums attest of strong worker-worker interactions. The existence of agencies and firms bidding on gigs on the platform as well as recruiting freelancers on the platform, suggests the existence of some forms of workers’ collective structures. In the forums, workers mainly exchange anecdotes about sketchy clients, tips on how to earn visibility, advice on to run a sustainable independent business. Some derogatory remarks about workers from countries with low cost of living affecting negatively the overall income for workers on the platform are also present.

Strong worker-client interactions are another feature. Upwork encourages workers to maintain good relations with their clients in the negotiation phase. This strong emphasis on worker-client interaction is supposed to act as an incentive for recurring clients to constitute pools of already vetted workers. However, several workers complain online about the platform being biased against the workers when mediation is required, and enforcing arbitrary sanctions toward workers. This uncertainty, coupled with the strong competition among workers, means that they undertake substantial unpaid work in order to get paid gigs (D’Cruz and Noronha, 2016)<sup>43</sup>. The bidding system has been proved to exercise “a downward pressure on pay rates”. Despite the high level of workers’ interaction, we saw no forms of worker organization emerge.

As a general note, we need to explore more thoroughly the differences of structure between highly demanded freelancers and microwork types, such as call centers and tech support. We highly suspect that working conditions largely diverge depending on the job type. Are taskified workers more often hired in what Upwork call “agencies” (instead of directly by a client)? Do accounts acting as an intermediaries between clients and external microworker networks are prevalent on the platform? We suggest that workers interview or focused participant observation might be good ways to overcome those difficulties.

### Additional notes & Figures:

↑ [-] [redacted] • 3 points 3 hours ago\*

↓ Tip: Compete on quality or compete on prices.

It is impossible to earn good wages according to developed country standard if you are average.

So either be cheapest or best.

Second tip: Upwork is not your friend. It's your enemy. They won't hesitate to ban you without even a serious consideration for imaginary reasons. Lot of people have faced the same problem.

So stay away from their radar.

[permalink](#) [embed](#) [save](#) [report](#) [reply](#)

Screenshot 1: Example of platform mistrust in Upwork's subreddit

43 D’Cruz, Premilla & Noronha, Ernesto (2016). “Positives outweighing negatives: the experiences of Indian crowdsourced workers”, *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation*, 10(1): 44-63.

### Social Media Marketer/ media buyer with experience in the eCommerce niche

Fixed-price - Posted 23 hours ago

**\$350**

Fixed Price

Looking for an experienced social media marketer/ media buyer to join my agency must have experience in the eCommerce niche.

No agencies

fluent in English

Fixed price per client

if this works out there is a possibility for ongoing work

Retargeting Jobs

Facebook Advertising Jobs

Social Media Management Jobs

eCommerce Jobs

Facebook Ads Manager Jobs

Instagram Marketing Jobs

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### I need a Graphic Designer to create thumbnails for my Youtube Channels.

Fixed-price - Posted 23 hours ago

**\$15**

Fixed Price

Hi there, I want to hire a graphic designer to create thumbnails for my Youtube Channels:

Linx Digital: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjP4kqaliSnxiLApPFrDOWA>

Patrick Red: <https://www.youtube.com/user/patrickjod84/videos>

Skills:

Must be creative, fast, hardworking, perfectionists and must have a very good sense of esthetics.