**VIADRINA CENTER
B/ORDERS IN
MOTION**

PANEL B2: **Collectivization of Interests across B/Orders in Gig Economy Platforms**

Joanna Bronowicka (Frankfurt/Oder)

Platform economy challenges and re-defines traditional b/orders of employment structures, including the collectivization of interests both of the employers and those of the employees. This panel will examine both aspects.

In particular, the panel will examine a variety of new gig economy platform models, which have reconfigured the interests of its creators and its users – from global crowdworking platforms, such as Amazon Mechanical Turk, to location-based applications such as Deliveroo. The panel will identify the nature of the collective interests of the different actors within the platform economy and the means they have used to protect them. The panel will also consider that platform economy models transcend borders between different nations and economy sectors, thus allowing its participants to enter into transnational coalitions. This transnational nature of platform economy creates new legal and normative challenges for collectivization goals and strategies.

Based on a survey of existing research projects, the panel will attempt to answer questions - Do traditional definitions of employer and workers' collective interests apply? Is there sufficient data to serve as an empirical ground for descriptions of collectivization of interests? Which gaps need to be filled, both in terms of theory building and in terms of empirical research? Can collectivization occur when the interests seem too diverse and possibly divergent? What is the role of technology in changing the circumstances for collective negotiations? Which organizational borders remain in place?

PANELISTS:

Labour Platforms, Algorithmic Control and Digital Resistance

Alex Wood (Oxford)

The remote gig economy, sometimes referred to as 'crowdwork', entails the provision of a wide variety of digital services via online labour platforms. These platforms enable the automation of core management functions such as spatial and temporal task allocation and labour control. This control centres on platform-based reputation systems which can lock workers into a particular platform. This creates a new form of precarity in which workers' livelihoods are dependent on platform reputations created by opaque algorithms over which workers have little direct control. Moreover, negative client feedback has the potential to significantly damage workers' future earnings. Fear of harsh feedback and changes to platforms were sources of constant worry for many workers, which we term 'algorithmic insecurity'. In this paper we explore how by creating new sources of insecurity

labour platforms also generate new forms of digital organisation and resistance which may provide embryonic foundations for the renewal of the labour movement. Our findings are based on semi-structured interviews (N=81) with 35 remote gig workers in the Global North and 35 in the Global South, and 11 freelancer community advocates; and on participant observation of 15 remote gig worker meetups and events (in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Manila and London).

Technology and Collective Action in App-Based Management

Joanna Bronowicka (Frankfurt/Oder)

The growth in platform-based employment in different sectors requires a deeper understanding of the structural role of algorithms in work environments. Mobile applications used by digital platforms for workforce management distribute tasks, optimize work process and evaluate workers. In these companies, the application acts partly as a 'boss', exerting managerial control over a large number of decentralized employees. In our interdisciplinary project conducted by sociologists and lawyers at Viadrina, we have examined how application-driven management is constituted as the social practice in Deliveroo and Foodora. We conducted interviews with bike couriers working for these food delivery services in Berlin in order to understand how autonomy and control are constructed and contested. We found that managerial control achieved through automated-decision making systems is based on an information asymmetry between the platform and the workers. What is particularly important, sudden and unilateral changes to technology that intensify control can lead to new individual and collective oppositional practices and strategies. In turn, demands about technology and user experience design are gaining importance is the ongoing efforts mobilize workers across food-delivery platforms and national borders.

On the conditions of possibility for labor organizing in the platform economy: Towards a more granular research approach

Niels van Doorn (Amsterdam)

The main question this paper aims to answer is: what are the conditions of possibility for labor organizing in the platform-based gig economy and what groups of workers are most likely to meet these conditions? I contend that while the role of networked mobile technologies in contemporary worker organization is certainly significant, so is the possibility of meeting physically in public: worker propinquity should therefore be reappraised as another vital condition that is necessary (yet by itself insufficient) for labor organizing in the platform economy. But who gets to partake in such propinquity and who can (afford to) be visible in public space? I reflect on this question, among others, and offer a heuristic typology which enables a more granular and differentiated approach to studying the possibilities for labor organizing in the platform/gig economy. This typology attends to six dimensions: 1) nature of the work; 2) platform business model; 3) platform design; 4) organization of labor process; 5) industry regulation; 6) socio-historical valuation of the work/industry.