

Towards a flexible or precarious future of working conditions?

Digital labor platforms and the Danish welfare state.

Algorithmic management of digital labor platforms and workers' practices to regain control of their autonomy have produced a growing literature on the "gig economy" in recent years. Despite much attention paid to ridehailing and crowdwork platforms, research work on, the less tech-intensive, housecleaning platforms is limited. The state-supported sociotechnical imaginary (Jasanoff 2015) of the platform economy in Denmark is promoted as offering opportunities to businesses and consumers. Platforms operate largely uncontrolled in terms of employment relations, tax issues, algorithmic transparency, and social dumping conditions. Nevertheless, many workers sign up to them either pursuing -what they term as- more flexible working arrangements or enduring and potentially resisting precarious employment. This paper investigates relations and practices in the Danish housecleaning platform economy, which is characterized by a proliferation of female, young, migrant workers of predominantly Latin-American origin. It engages ethnographically with platform housecleaners aspiring to analyze perceptions that are articulated from below, on both the nature of flexible/precarious working conditions and the role of technology in their consolidation. This study is not limited to platform and app-related features (such as rating, surveillance, algorithm-produced suggestions for customers, profile uploading etc.) but also aims to scrutinize how the Danish digitalized welfare state's policies and infrastructure potentially contribute to workers' insecurity. This paper claims that the double evolution towards an individualization of risk for workers and an individualization of social problems promoted by contemporary digital welfare states creates the adequate political ecology for the proliferation of platform work, within an environment of structured uncertainty.