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Towards decent platform work

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Workshop:
Work in the digital age: The
challenges of platform firms

The challenge of decent work: from global supply chains to digital platforms

Mode of organization		Industrial Organization	Post-industrial organization	Market organizer
Mechanism of loosened couplings				
Delocalization	(place)	Low	Medium	High
Delegation	(input)	Low	Medium	High
Intermediation	(output)	Low	Low	High
Stages, governance & labor				
Stages		Modern Corporation	Nikefikation	Uberization
Central governance mechanism		Hierarchy	Network	Market
Dominant labor pattern		Careers	Jobs	Tasks

Organizing decent digital platform work

Mobilizing and collective action

Industry standards & social partnership

Certification

Regulation

Platforms enabling participation

„Soft"private/public approaches

„Hard" public approaches

Thinking alternatives: Platforms cooperatives
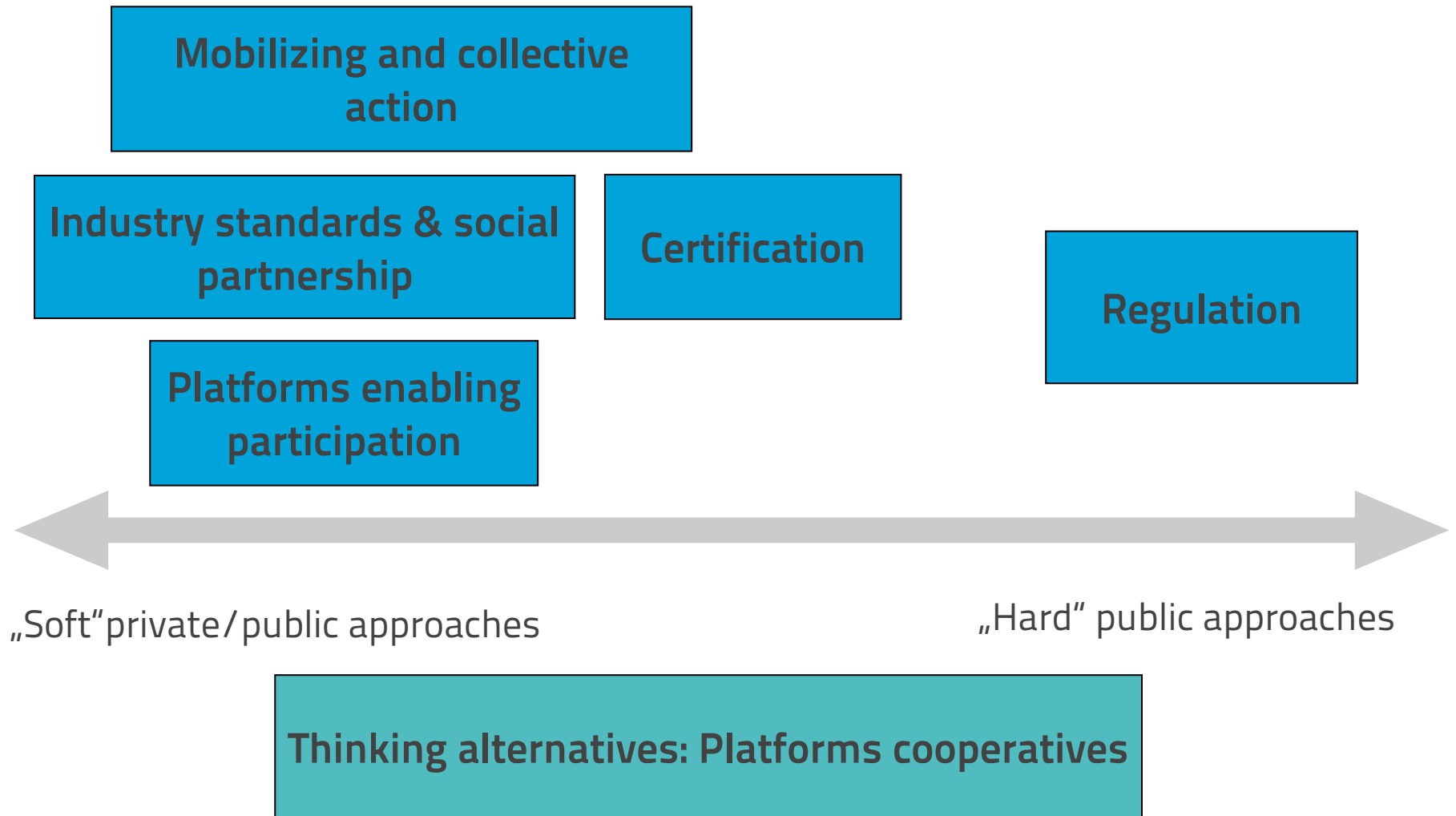
Regulation: a field level approach

1) Self regulation by platforms as market organizers

▸ Regulation embedded in technology and rules

▸ E.g. evaluative infrastructures, membership rules,…

2) Collective actors and civil society

▸ Business associations, trade unions

▸ Private sector established companies and start-ups

▸ Alternative platforms and social movements

▸ Workers, consumers

3) Traditional regulators – different approaches

▸ Accommodate and hope, ban and restore, trim and adjust

▸ Different approaches, varying by country (Thelen, 2018; Frenken et al., 2019)

Highly contextualized incumbent-challenger dynamics

Kirchner, Stefan and Elke Schüßler (2020). Regulating the sharing economy: a field perspective. Research in the Sociology of Organizations: Theorizing the Sharing Economy: Variety and Trajectories of New Forms of Organizing.

Overview studies: private regulation efforts

▸ Study 1: platform-based crowdworker voice

(self-regulation on individual platforms)

▸ Study 2: collective self-regulation via industry association

(Code), then union-supported social partnership co-

regulation approach

▸ Study 3: conceptualizing private regulation of decent

platform work – levels and dynamics

Study 1: How do crowdworkers gain voice on digital work platforms?

Our study

Interviews, covert observation and documents

6 German platforms

Platform	Domain	Exemplary tasks
Clicker	Outsourcing of micro-tasks	Data editing, web searches, filling surveys
Designer	Design	Designing a firm logo
Innovator	Innovation & Marketing	Creating novel product design
Searcher	Information gathering	Take a photo of a shop window
Tester	Application testing	Testing an app/website
Writer	Content creation	Writing a product description

Einstiegstest für Autoren

Was ist hier falsch?

- ☐ Fluss
- ☐ Spaß
- ☐ meißtens
- ☐ Strasse

Ihre Antwort wird automatisch abgeschickt in:

> **5**
> Sekunden

SUPPORT CENTER

⭐ What are the different types of projects on ▮▮▮▮?

How is ▮▮▮▮ different from other design platforms?

Open project: What are the awards I can earn?

Findings: **Platforms enable voice**

‣ Small platforms with high competition may enable crowdworker voice to decrease turnover and increase output quality

‣ Creation of functional voice regimes emphasizing procedural issues: enabling direct communication or proactively seek feedback from crowdworkers to improve work-related processes and in some instances platform-wide organization

‣ There is a business case for such voice regimes but some platforms seek to proactively involve workers due to management's value orientation

Gegenhuber, T., Ellmer, M., & Schüßler, E. (2020). Microphones, not megaphones : Functional crowdworker voice regimes on digital work platforms. Human Relations.

Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct - Ombuds Office

If you think you have been treated unfairly on one of the platforms that have signed the Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct, you can submit a complaint to the Ombuds Office. The Ombuds Office is a mediator between crowdsourcing platforms and crowdworkers. The members of the Ombuds Office seek to find fair solutions to disagreements by consensus.

For the Ombuds Office to consider a case, the following conditions must be met:

1. The platform in question must have signed the Crowdsourcing Code of Conduct.
2. You have a concrete complaint, for example about money or procedures on the platform.
3. You have already tried to discuss the matter directly with the platform; however, this has not led to a solution.

Study 2: Platform social partnership

▸ National contexts are important factor for mediating labour relations

▸ German digital work platforms (mostly cloudwork) forged a platform social partnership in negotiation with the German Labour Union IG Metall: agreement on enforceable mechanisms

▸ Platforms join for distinguishing themselves from American Platforms and hope to prevent harmful regulation

▸ IG Metall can achieve quick wins for crowdworkers, gain experience and position itself as relevant player in the digital economy

Gegenhuber, T., Schüßler, E; Reischauer, G., & Thäter, L. (2021). Advancing Decent Platform Work through a Social Partnership–Oriented Institutional Infrastructure. Research in the Sociology of Organizations.

Spillover effects?

"We learned that the social partnership model can also work in the digital world. People said that for this type of technical, complex and global work it is impossible to have a system fostering dialogue and exchange. We proved that this is wrong."

‣ Several institutions refer in their reports to the platform social partnership model (e.g. EU Commission, ILO, German Parliament)

Gegenhuber, T., Schüßler, E; Reischauer, G., & Thäter, L. (2021). Advancing Decent Platform Work through a Social Partnership-Oriented Institutional Infrastructure. Research in the Sociology of Organizations.

Study 3: Mobilizing and collective action

Where?	Who?	What impact?
• Location-based **gig work** platforms • **Cloudwork** platforms mediating *routine* or *creative* tasks	• ***Workers:*** *autonomous organizing* initiatives by workers • ***Platforms and other organizations:*** *platform-driven initiatives* to provide voice and participation structures • ***Unions:*** *union-supported* organization of workers by established unions	• ***No direct impact***, but creates a space for workers to support each other • ***Micro-level impact*** changes working conditions on one platform • ***Meso-level impact*** results in changes across several platforms in the same industry • ***Macro-level impact*** leads to changes across platforms and industries

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