

1. Events

Event Details

RGS-IBG 2022: Recovering geographies of labour and mobility in platformised delivery work

Conference session

Start date : 30 August 2022 09:00

Date de fin : 1 September 2022 17:00

Where : Newcastle

Hosted by : Royal Geographical Society & Institute of British Geographers

Information sources :

<https://www.rgs.org/geography/news/rgs-ibg-annual-international-conference-2022/>

Organisers: Cosmin Popan (Manchester Metropolitan University) & Justin Spinney (Cardiff University)

The two fastest growing sectors of the new industrial structure in advanced capitalist economies are the proficians and precariat (Standing 2014). Whilst they have stark similarities and differences, what sets them apart more than anything are the ways in which their employment relations are mediated: the former through personal and propinquitous human relations; the latter through standardised internet-based mobile technologies. This platformisation (Stehlin et al 2020) and acceleration of job flexibilization has given rise to the 'gig economy', with mobile deliveries representing one of its most dynamic sectors. Whilst many proponents argue that app-mediated platforms are value neutral, the sector is characterised by the 'hyper-commodification' of labour where employees are reduced to closely monitored and quantified commodities whose labour is bought and sold on a daily basis (Mackinnon and Cumbers 2014: p164), and for whom the ability to organise and agitate for better conditions is greatly reduced (Spinney & Popan 2020).

During pandemic lock-downs around the world, when many people's personal mobility was heavily curtailed, the demand for already establishing and emergent app-mediated food and grocery delivery services such as Deliveroo, Rappi, Glovo, Amazon Flex etc grew rapidly (Popan and Anaya-Boig 2021). The signs are that in the early stages of recovery, demand for these services has continued, suggesting longer-term changes in the consuming habits of citizens in relation to a range of goods, and in turn introducing thousands of workers around the world to profoundly new labour relations, processes and markets. This session seeks to critically explore these ongoing shifts at a range of scales as they affect the workers involved in these industries. Our focus in particular is on the

new geographies of labour and mobility produced at the intersection of the virtual/physical. Papers might address the following topics:

- Investigation of the 'flipping' and interdependencies of moorings and mobility in pandemic/post-pandemic worlds as the immobility of some becomes predicated on the increased mobility of others.
- The changing place of work for those providing delivery services: for example 'where' workers are located between deliveries; the regional geography of delivery services; and the shaping of longer term migration patterns.
- The gendered and intersectional experiences of gig work: consideration of the unequal geographies of opportunity and risks in the city; and extent and implications of gendered assumptions embedded in mobile platforms.
- The affective dimensions of mobility work and strategies of coping/resistance employed by workers: papers may consider both the remunerative and punitive effects of apps with regard to gamifying work experiences, addiction, discipline and control.
- The broader impact of platformised work on everyday urban mobility and access to mobility: papers may consider the ways in which the demands of platform-mediated work shapes access to urban spaces (parking, pavement etc), risk, vulnerability, criminality, vehicle modification etc.
- Political-economic exploration of mobile platforms as 'mobility fixes' that help to overcome problems of accumulation caused by pandemic restrictions, for example bringing together consumers and producers when physical mobility is curtailed.
- The management of platform users (both producers and consumers) in relation to task design, task standards, ratings and punitive/reward measures, and the effects of opaque algorithmic decisions.
- The extent and ways in which mediation through online platforms redefines roles and redraws boundaries between producers and consumers; for example the impact misclassification of workers as self-employed has on solidarity amongst workers themselves and workers and the broader public.

Mobility

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

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Practical informations :

We welcome theoretical and empirical papers from a range of academic disciplines, including but not limited to geography, anthropology, sociology, architecture, cultural studies and history. Abstracts of no more than 250 words should be submitted by Friday the 18th of March 2022 to Justin Spinney (spinneyj@cardiff.ac.uk) and Cosmin Popan (c.popan@mmu.ac.uk).