

A competitive and inclusive Digital Single Market

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The 'Sharing Economy': A Virtual Wild West?

The Dynamics of Virtual Work

An international interdisciplinary
research network on the
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For more information go to: <http://dynamicsofvirtualwork.com/>

Some buzz words

- Crowdsourcing
- Cloudsourcing
- Collaborative consumption
- Sharing economy
- Digital labour
- Prosumption
- Co-creation
- Digital commons
- Peer-to-peer networking
- Playbour



Shifting boundaries between production and consumption

- Labour externalized to consumers in the form of self-service (e.g. booking airline tickets)
- Labour externalized to citizens (e.g. filing tax returns)
- Consumer specification of products (e.g. custom sports shoes)
- Audience participation/content-generation in media (e.g. blogging, tweeting, posting videos on Youtube, 'comments' on news stories)
- 'Crowdsourced' provision of services:
 - Service suppliers linked with service users via online platforms
- Consumers' rights and workers' rights strongly inter-linked

Some general trends in crowdsourcing

- Rapid expansion of major corporate players (e.g Amazon, Airbnb, Uber, Elance) helped by:
 - Effective systems for international money transfer
 - Sophisticated use of big data – targeted advertising
 - General network advantages (size and international spread make it more likely that consumers can find what they want where they want it)
- What began as a telemediated introduction of individuals to each other is increasingly involving companies e.g.
 - Commercial property companies using Airbnb
 - Companies using Taskrabbit and Homejoy to substitute for normal employees
- Emergence of new companies (e.g. Wonolo) specifically designed to cater to business market (substituting for temporary work agencies)
- Quasi-employment relationships (without employment rights)
- Development of a vulnerable underclass dependent on crowdsourcing as main source of income or supplement to it.

Unresolved issues

- Insurance
- Legal liability
- Professional qualifications
- Safety standards
- Dispute resolution
- Haphazard vetting processes
- Protection of vulnerable populations
- Application of existing legislation e.g.
 - Consumer protection standards
 - Temporary workers directive
 - Working hours directive
 - Minimum wage
 - Health and safety regulations
 - Data protection

Opportunities and risks

Opportunities

- Enables access to work for people who would otherwise be excluded (eg people with disabilities, carers, people in developing economies)
- Provides affordable services to consumers on a just-in-time basis
- Provides new opportunities for flexible ways to combine work and private life
- Reduces risks for employers and customers
- Enables low-cost entry into market for new enterprises or firms trying out new products or services
- Enables social innovation

Risks

- Lack of training – risk of substandard / dangerous work
- Loss of commitment
- Loss of quality control
- Precariousness
- Race to the bottom (undercutting of good employers)
- Health and safety risks – both to customers and workers
- Lack of regulation may lead to criminal activity (e.g. money laundering)
- Unravelling of national / EU regulatory environment

For more information

- <http://dynamicsofvirtualwork.com>
- http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions/isch/Actions/IS1202
- <http://monthlyreview.org/books/pb4635/>

