URBAN ASSEMBLAGE: THE CITY AS ARCHITECTURE, MEDIA, AI AND BIG DATA.

• Paper / Proposal Title:

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• Abstract (300 words):
Food delivery riders have received increasing attention during the pandemic, arguably becoming the most visible segment of the so-called ‘gig economy’, and gaining the badge of ‘essential workers’ in media narratives. Among the many factors influencing gig economy workers perception, adaptation, and repurposing of a platform’s algorithmic system, diverse local contexts and their specific regulatory frameworks, labour market conditions, and (techno-)political cultures are likely to play a crucial role. Whereas existing studies tackled the issue of the transnationalization of the online labour force across different contexts, a systematic assessment of the influence of local cultural, political and legal factors in how gig economy workers engage with their ‘algorithmic boss’ is missing. This project aims at advancing our knowledge on the issue of platformized labour from the specific angle of how the local context engages vis-à-vis a global platform. Hence, our main research question: (How) Does the local context play out in the relation between gig economy workers and their hosting platform? To answer this question, the research takes up a comparative approach, investigating workers’ relation towards platforms (Uber Eats) in different local contexts (Amsterdam, Milan, and Buenos
Aires). The relation between riders and platform/algorithms is operationalized along three dimensions, corresponding to three sub-questions: 1) Algorithmic imaginaries: How do riders represent, talk about, and imagine the algorithmic system they interact with?; 2) Algorithmic resistance: How do riders engage with the platform to resist and/or subvert its disciplinary goals?; 3) Platformized labour: How do riders perceive their working conditions and would like to act upon them? In this presentation, we will share the theoretical and methodological framework, at the intersection between urban studies and platform studies, that we developed to answer these questions.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Letizia Chiappini is a Ph.D. candidate in Urban Studies at the University of Amsterdam and the University of Milano-Bicocca. Her research revolves around urban and societal transformations concerning digital platforms. In her PhD research, she proposes the concept of ‘urban digital platform’ as a theoretical lens to analyse digital platforms oriented to support grassroots initiatives and citizen engagement. Such as civic crowdfunding and complementary welfare platforms. It is a comparative analysis based on four years of fieldwork in Milan and Amsterdam. In particular, the research project attends to how a diverse set of differentially situated urban actors can influence processes of policymaking in the two cities. As such the project is positioned within the broad field of urban political economy. In other ongoing projects, she investigates the maker movement, crafting, digital fabrication and making more broadly (e.g. makerspace) as an alternative mode and space of production, starting from initial empirical engagement in Milan.

Davide Beraldo is a postdoc in the DATACTIVE and ALEX projects, and lecturer in New Media and Digital Culture (UvA). He is a scholar in the field of new media and digital culture, at the intersection between media studies and political sociology. His current research deals with data activism, algorithmic bias, and irony politics. More in particular, Davide is currently working on: developing and testing algorithmic auditing methodologies on social media; investigating algorithmic imaginaries and representations through digital research methods; integrating insights from critical data studies into social movement studies; developing a grant proposal related to irony politics in online political contention. In his PhD thesis he focused on the interplay between social movements and digital media, investigating the role of symbolism in contemporary movements from a semiotic point of view and with digital research methods. He has a developing publication track in a variety of subfields related to new media and digital culture. His main research interests are: digitally-mediated movements; algorithmic systems and imaginaries; socio-semiotic of the digital; digital methods; epistemology of complexity.

Giovanni Rossetti is a Research Master's student in Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam and a research assistant in the “Global Boss, Local Workers” (GLOBLOW)
project. His research focuses on the organization and resistance of workers in platform-mediated environments. He is currently writing his rMA thesis that explores the organization and unionization of food-delivery riders and the strategies and tactics deployed to oppose platforms' logics.