

IGU-100-Paris 2022

Special Tricenary Session: ‘Urban care platforms and intersectional inequalities’

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The digital platform economy has become an increasingly central actor for socioeconomic processes in cities. Service platforms such as Airbnb, Lieferando, Helpling and Uber operate as intermediaries re-organizing and transforming cities and the everyday lives of their inhabitants (Altenried et al. 2021; van Dijck et al. 2018). Service platforms as hegemonic business model realise profit not by providing services, but by building digital networks between supply and demand, between workers and customers. They aim for a concentration or even monopolisation of services in terms of market share and they tend to disrupt labour markets and exacerbate working conditions (Kenney/Zysman 2020; Srnicek 2016; Zwick 2018). Moreover, platforms that digitally mediate service provision predominantly target large cities because of their population density and the availability of both potential (and precarious) workers and customers (Sadowski 2020); they reorganise labour, service and consumption patterns and reshape social structures and everyday routines in cities (Berg et al. 2018). Gendered division of labour, neoliberal precarity and racial capitalism are essential features for care-service platforms (Huws 2019).

Feminist, labour and economic geographers have long documented how caring activities are increasingly transformed into waged work (Lawson 2007; McDowell et al. 2005). This commodification and marketization of care (Schwiter et al. 2018) is fuelled by aging populations, labour migration, changing gender relations and increasing numbers of double income households. Despite its technocapitalist re-commodification, a large share of care service work has remained invisible as it is bound to the home as an ‘invisible private space’. The invisibility of care work is still linked to its social and economic devaluation and increasingly also to its racialization. The invisibility of platform mediated care work is inextricably linked to intersecting gendered, classed and racialised precarities and vulnerabilities (van Doorn 2017).

With the session we want to discuss (1) how digital platforms reorganise care services in and through urban space, (2) how these platforms transform labour in care services such as cleaning, child-/senior care and food delivery and (3) how the platformisation of these services and their spatial structures reshape intersectional inequalities.

We invite empirical and theoretical contributions linking macropolitical structures of platformisation with the micropolitics of urban everyday life and embodied subjects’ experiences.