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# FIRST RULE: KEEP PEDALLING. CO-THEORISING WITH FOOD-DELIVERY WORKERS HOW TO MAKE DIGITAL PLATFORMS CAPABILITY-ENHANCING.

Pietro Ghirlanda\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Università degli Studi di Pavia [Italia] = University of Pavia [Italy] = Université de Pavie [Italie] – Italy

## Abstract

In both the academic and public debate, there is an increasing consensus that digital labour platforms can have both positive and negative impacts on digital workers' well-being (Myhill, Richards, & Sang, 2021). This article has two aims: the first is to evaluate this impact through the multidimensional lens of the capability approach (Sen, 1999), taking the food-delivery sector in the city of Verona as a case study. The second aim is to involve selected riders in a co-theorising process to imagine how platforms should be designed to become capability enablers (see Bueno, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022), creating the conditions for new forms of collective action. To reach them, the research combines two different qualitative methods: a covert auto-ethnography (Gobo, 2008), during which the author worked for a food-delivery platform, and a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews, based on the participant observation period and inspired by the dynamic public reflective equilibrium technique (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007). The most promising alternative that emerged from the empirical research is the platform cooperative model, i.e. platforms that are democratically governed and collectively owned by their workers and users (Scholz, 2023). Moreover, in addition to contributing to defining the principles that should govern platforms' design and exploring platform workers' risks and conditions, this article makes two specific contributions to the literature on the capability approach. Methodologically, it contributes to the so-called list debate by proposing a synthesising method for selecting capabilities that combines philosophical and empirical insights (Byskov, 2018). Theoretically, it frames the relevant capabilities identified during the research under a meta-capability for meaningful work (see Holland, 2008 and Weidel, 2018), which is included as an essential dimension for achieving overall human flourishing, opening the path to a multi-level analysis of a flourishing life's different dimensions.

**Keywords:** gig economy, platform cooperatives, autoethnography, dynamic public reflective equilibrium, capabilities list, meaningful work

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\*Speaker