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**Project: Gig economy and its Implications for Social
Dialogue and Workers' Protection**

"Social Partnership and Gig Economy in Greece: Continuity or Discontinuity?"

Maria Mexi

University of Geneva

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Introduction

Developments in the *gig economy* have attracted immense attention in academic and policy-making circles recently. Gig economy consists both of work that is transacted via platforms but delivered in a specific locality and of platforms that enable remote working (Wood et al., 2019a). These platforms, operating either in the *global* or the *local* gig economy, act as market intermediaries that significantly reduce the overhead costs of outsourcing microtasks ('gigs') and offshoring by providing a standardized framework for identifying, contracting and paying workers. A World Bank study estimates that digital outsourcing platforms, bringing millions of clients and workers together to exchange money for labour in the form of digital gigs (Kuek et al., 2015), had annual revenues of \$4.8 billion in 2016, and that these will have grown to \$15–\$25 billion by 2020 (ibid.).

As the gig economy is expanding in size and importance, uncertainty around what to expect remains while observers regularly fall prey to bouts of either optimistic or pessimistic views on its disruptive impact. Sceptics claim that while many workers are enjoying increased income and autonomy, the manner in which gig economy platforms operate can result in low pay, social isolation, working unsocial and irregular hours, overwork, sleep deprivation and exhaustion (Wood et al., 2019). While these issues are not new in the world of work, gig workers face some unique barriers when it comes to rectifying them.

During rapid economic and labour market changes in the past, workers have formed labour organisations to advocate for their needs and interests. But, that organising often presumed "a single employer, a single workplace, and a set of duties and obligations that can be structured around a contract that stays in place for several years" (Sabeel Rahman, 2016; p.11). In the gig economy, given the moves away from full-time work and direct employment, these factors are no longer explicitly relevant. It is also the case that national labour laws are not applied to gig workers. This issue is particularly acute in the *global* gig economy, where transactions cross national borders, and it becomes unclear which jurisdictions' regulations apply. Overall, pessimistic and Polanyi-inspired accounts of the gig economy stress that, due to its *dis-embedding* in institutional interventions (particularly welfare states and strong trade unions), labour in the gig economy is increasingly being *re-commodified*, a process which intensifies the disciplinary power of labour market competition. As Wood et al (2019b) note, "the pendulum has swung from commodification to de-commodification and back again".

Concerns about the negative outcomes has led to both calls for interventions and actual interventions by the social partners in several countries. Many of these come in the form of proposals, guidelines and codes all of which aim to alter the behaviour of key digital gig economy actors. They can often be thought of as ethical standards of some sort given they are promoted in the name of fairness, justice, etc; but they also fall under the heading of "decent

work" (ILO, 1999). At the same time, new evidence suggests that digital gig economy actors are hesitantly beginning to engage in tripartite dialogue (Kilhoffer et al, 2017; Mexi, 2019).

Our study

Our study seeks to add to the literature on the intersection of the gig economy and social partner responses at national level. It particularly examines the impact of the Greek model of social partnership on actors' responses to the rise of the gig economy, and the role of employers and trade unions in Greece. It thus assesses the role of policy legacies and the extent to which they affect social partner responses and changes, and in what ways. Applying a modified version of the classification used by Hall (1993), we provide evidence on two types of impact: (i) *First-level (ideational/cognitive) change*, which leads to an alteration of public policy discourses. In this regard, we identify how social partners perceive risks and opportunities in relation to gig economy and work, and whether and how they have modified their language in discussing and analysing issues. This also involves identifying impacts in terms of knowledge diffusion and the broadening of the social partners' policy agenda, strategies and tactics of mobilisation and representation; (ii) *Second-level (institutional/policy) change*, which opens up space for reforms in social partners' preferences and organisational resources. At this level of analysis, we have sought to identify whether and how social partners become actively involved in policy reforms to address growing problems related to the gig economy and labour, triggering institutional change through a change in their sets of preferences. It should be stressed that first- and second-level changes do not work in silos but they are interwoven, as ideas reinforce the drive towards the adoption of policies. Hence, we argue that prevalent ideas should be examined before we attempt to deduce the empirical and/or transformative element of a policy response taken to address the consequences of the gig-economy.

The research method employed in our research is the triangulation of qualitative research methods, namely, a review of relevant policy and regulatory documents, an archival search of trade unions' and employers organisations' announcements, press releases and other printed and online material, and; 28 in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted between mid-2018 and mid-2019 in Greece with policy-makers, members of trade unions and employers' organisations, owners of digital platforms in the transport sector, policy experts, academics, journalists, and workers engaged in activities provided by or through digital platforms such as Uber and Airbnb.¹

A snapshot to the Greek case

In Greece, the recent economic crisis has been a tremendous help to the growth of services provided by platforms such as Airbnb and, more broadly, to the expansion of the gig economy

¹ The interviews were conducted by the project research assistant, Ms Eleni Greenwood.

or "sharing economy" - as mostly referred to by Greek policy actors and stakeholders in public discourses. As one of our interviewees (representative of an employer's organisation) stated, *"in a country with one of the highest unemployment rates in the European Union, digital platforms especially in the hospitality and tourism industry are creating jobs and new revenue opportunities"*. Yet, even though the gig economy in Greece is increasingly growing, there exists limited attention in the public discourses of what exactly these processes entail and what the most relevant multifaceted drivers and effects are. Contrary to what is happening in other European countries, gig economy and work are poorly understood, particularly in the realm of labour issues. For instance, unlike the policy debate and focus in other European countries, fundamental questions such as whether a gig worker can rightfully be classified as an independent contractor have remained largely untackled in Greece. As emphatically pointed out by an interviewed trade unionist referring to the phenomenon of the gig economy: *"This new sector is still uncharted waters for us"*. Greek policy-makers and regulators have become interested in the gig economy primarily from the perspective of tax avoidance by digital platforms and loss of public revenues.

To this day, therefore, the gig economy has not constituted a particular topic of high contention between Greek workers and employers and, unlike other European countries, it has not given rise to a new framework for facilitating intense discussion, collaboration or social dialogue between the parties involved. There are several factors contributing to this result. One may be the relatively small size of the gig economy workforce vis-a-vis the general workforce, though the growing gig economy activities especially in the hospitality and tourism industries have the potential to rapidly change the quality of jobs and to completely reshape the business activities pertaining to those particular industries. Moreover looking deeper, we have sought to assess how the nature and evolution of Greek social partnership have affected social partners' responses to the gig economy and their capacity to instigate substantial policy reforms. Our empirical findings show an overall strong link between social partnership and social partners' responses. We show that this link is mediated by certain historical legacies and inherent weaknesses (or idiosyncrasies) of the Greek model of social partnership and trade unionism that have proved difficult to reverse. In particular, Greece is a representative case of a Southern European country characterised by crony capitalism and weak labour market institutions, strong clientelism and low levels of policy concertation, a guild-oriented social structure and a history of adversarial industrial relations, trade union fragmentation and low institutionalisation of bargaining procedures (Zambarloukou, 2006).

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first section offers a broad-brush picture of key debates on the gig economy, gig work and social dialogue with the aim to highlight the issues at stake and the (still unresolved) policy and regulatory questions. This involves a theoretical discussion and summary of evidence in the international academic and policy

literature. Having set the general background, the second and third sections delve more deeply into the Greek case. The third section investigates how, in a country still recovering from the trauma of the economic crisis, the rise of new digital platforms, especially in the big hospitality and tourism industry, presents new threats, but also new opportunities. The third section then detects and empirically assesses *first- and second-level changes*, highlighting key ideational, organisational (in terms of mobilising and representing actors in the gig economy) and policy responses. The link between the model of Greek social partnership and the gig economy is also explored as well as the salience of mediating variables, such as past legacies affecting Greek actors' responses to adequately address the gig economy challenge. The paper concludes by summarising the findings of our study and making suggestions for further action.

1 - Key debates on *gig economy*, *gig work* and social dialogue: an overview

A large number of existing studies in the literature on the gig economy have primarily focused on labour issues and on questions of gig workers' mobilisation and organisation. Several authors have argued that work in the gig economy can at times have similarities with very old working arrangements, such as *putting-out work/homework*² and *piecework*.³ The type of *putting-out/homework* shares many similarities with *crowdwork* defined as *the organising of outsourcing of tasks to a large pool of workers* potentially provided to a wide range of customers/employers through digital platforms (Prassl and Risak, 2016; De Stefano, 2016). Previous studies have also emphasized that crowdwork closely resembles other types of flexible and non-standard employment such as temporary work, part-time work or temporary agency work. Research has provided evidence for the growth in insecure and precarious work and non-standard forms of employment, and how this potentially hinders long-term job market incentives for innovation (Vosko, 2010; Kalleberg, 2010; 2011; Standing, 2011; Malhotra and Van Alstyne, 2014), long before the rise of the digital, platform-based, gig economy. Hence, a distinct literature on labour market precariousness in the gig economy seem to have evolved in parallel with – and inspired from - the relevant literature in the traditional economy (see, e.g., Smith and Leberstein, 2015; JRC, 2016), feeding into each other.

In this context, studies drawing on the *insider–outsider* theory (Lindbeck and Snower, 2002; Rueda, 2005) have brought information on how established workers (*insiders*) have used their

² Referring to a type of subcontracting used at early stages of industrialisation whereby work is contracted by a central agent to subcontractors who complete work either in their own homes or in workshops (Risak and Warter, 2015).

³ Referring to a form of employment common under the guild system before the 18th century as well as in the Industrial era in which a worker is paid a fixed piece for each action performed or unit produced irrespective of time.

bargaining power to protect their employment because of strong employment protection legislation and worker replacement costs. Conversely, *outsiders*, such as young and unemployed or gig workers, have lacked political influence to leverage change, either at their immediate workplace or beyond – that is, in terms of social policy and legislation. Critics argue that mainstream trade unions almost exclusively represent permanent and full-time workers (Standing, 2011). The insider–outsider model has been criticized several times, especially when research has illuminated how its implications have informed a deregulatory agenda to increase inequality in the job market and to further weaken collective rights (see, e.g. Emmenegger, 2009; Rubery et al, 2016).

Gig worker status and employment rights

Moreover, our literature review shows that the majority of prior research is preoccupied with the regulatory challenges posed by gig economy and work. These, as studies suggest, are manifold and "*span the entire map of the legal world, including work, tax, safety and health, quality and consumer protection, intellectual property, zoning, and anti-discrimination*" (Lobel 2016; p.13). Within this context, an impassioned debate has flourished around labour, employment and social law. As most commonly emphasized, in many jurisdictions, a person working in the digital, platform-based, gig economy will be considered a freelancer, self-employed, and the platform company itself more of an *intermediary* than an *employer stricto sensu*. In this respect, labour law becomes inapplicable. As a result, in many instances, issues of worker *misclassification* have led to workers being denied statutory protection such as minimum wage, health and safety protections or paid annual leave. Thus, what has been discussed by a great number of authors in literature is the creation of a *new type of employment relationship* for workers in the gig economy, sometimes called *dependent contractor* or *independent worker*, with some, but not all, of the rights of the traditional employee (Aloisi, 2016; Cherry, 2016; Cherry and Aloisi, 2017). This has been explored through several different regulatory options in Europe.

Four main approaches can be identified:⁴

A first approach – most commonly found in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom - is to apply the current legal provisions to platform work:

This has come to involve a case-by-case assessment (by courts) of whether the platform worker falls within the category of a self-employed (leaving most employment law

⁴ An exhaustive discussion is not within the scope of this part, but a brief discussion is necessary to provide a background of the overview of national policy and regulatory responses in Greece discussed later in this report. For a detailed discussion see, e.g.: Cohen and Sundararajan, 2015; European Commission Staff Working Paper, 2015; Frenken et al, 2015; Gobble, 2015; Greenhouse, 2015; Hall and Krueger, 2015; Harris and Krueger, 2015; Jenk, 2015; Kenney and Zysman, 2015; Koopman et al, 2015; Miller, 2015; Ranchordas, 2015; Rauch and Schleicher, 2015; Sprague, 2015; Grossman and Woyke, 2016; Kennedy, 2016).

inapplicable, see e.g. Belgium, Denmark), or in a category of employee,⁵ or in some countries falls in a third category in between (i.e. an intermediate category). The latter would seem to be the case in Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

A second approach -preferred by the French regulators - concerns the application of specific employment, social and other protections to platform workers:

The Act of 8 August 2016 on work, modernisation of social dialogue and securing of career paths (Loi n° 2016-1088 du 8 août 2016 relative au travail, à la modernisation du dialogue social et à la sécurisation des parcours professionnels) in France foresees the provision of minimum social rights to independent workers in an economically and technically dependent relationship with an online platform along with, inter alia, the right to continuing professional training and validation of working experience on the platform by the platform company, and the right to join trade unions and to exert collective action as well as social security contributions in some limited cases. It is however worth noting that the French Court of Cassation, in its judgement no. 1737 of 28 November 2018, reclassified the drivers of a food delivery platform as employees, contrary to the lower courts. After this judgement, on 11 January 2019, the Court of Appeal in Paris accepted the claim of an Uber driver to be reclassified as an employee.

A third approach is "the one currently being pursued by the EU institutions, and it amounts to gradually strengthening and clarifying (without necessarily expanding) the EU 'worker' definition, including by means of judicial interpretation and through the adoption of new regulatory instruments, such as Directives and Recommendation" (Countouris and De Stefano, 2019; p.16):

Along this approach, we find the new Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions in the European Union. The stated objective of the new Directive is "to provide protection for the widest categories of workers and in particular the most vulnerable workers". The key merit of the Directive is that it introduces a nuanced approach towards the mandatory information obligation regime for every employment relationship, regardless of its form. Platform workers can fall under the scope of the Directive and be protected against unpredictable work patterns which may eventually contribute to enhancing the transparency of their jobs. Yet, as Bednarowicz (2019) notes: "the biggest pitfall is that the Directive has a different target group which is certainly not all platform workers. For them to enjoy the rights, they need to be first reclassified from bogus (false) self-employment and that might be an easier case for on-demand work (e.g. Uber, Deliveroo), but definitely not for crowdworkers who perform their tasks solely online (e.g. Amazon Mechanical Turk, Upwork, Clickworker).

⁵ As demonstrated by a London employment tribunal in the United Kingdom in 2016 which upheld a ruling that Uber must treat its drivers as 'workers' entitled to the minimum wage and holiday pay (refer to: *Aslam & Ors v Uber BV & Ors* [2016] EW Misc B68 (ET) 28 October 2016).

This will not be done automatically by virtue of the Directive, which nonetheless mentions in the recitals that false classification of a self-employed person under national law does not preclude the person from being a worker under EU law (Case C-413/13 FNV)".

A fourth (more inclusive) approach concerns the extension of the application of labour, social and other benefits and protections to all workers, not only in employment but also in self-employment (e.g. there are arguments for the introduction of minimum pay standards in the form of minimum fees for the self-employed) (Grosheide and Barenberg, 2016):

The EU's Access to Social Security Initiative reflects this approach which aims, particularly, at ensuring the protection of people in non-standard employment and those experiencing frequent transitions between, and combinations of, forms of dependent employment and self-employment, leaving them without sufficient access to (and transferability of) labour and social protection benefits (European Commission 2017). Another example can be found in the broad and universalistic aspirations implicit to the scope advocated in art 1 of CGIL's, Carta dei diritti universali del lavoro – Nuovo statuto di tutte le lavoratrici e di tutti i lavoratori (2016) providing that "The provisions of Title I of this law apply to all workers who hold contracts of employment and self-employment".

Significantly, the Report of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work proposes a breakthrough in this direction: basic labour rights for all workers ("regardless of their contractual arrangement or employment status"), including the self-employed. This includes the call to adopt a Universal Labour Guarantee for all workers, drawing on the ILO fundamental principles and rights at work, namely: (i) a set of basic working conditions: (ii) "adequate living wage", (iii) limits on hours of work, and (iv) safe and healthy workplaces as well as (v) "freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining and freedom from forced labour, child labour and discrimination". It should be mentioned that the Preamble of the ILO Constitution already calls for advancing working conditions in these areas without making any distinction between employees and self-employed workers. Moreover, the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work expressly provides that the Universal Labour Guarantee is aimed at supplementing, and not replacing, current legal protections of those who already are in an employment relationship.

Social dialogue in the gig economy milieu

In short, the reviewed evidence regarding the legal classification of workers in the gig economy suggests that, whereas the challenges to the traditional binary employment relationship are not unique to the gig economy, policy and regulatory responses must address more dynamically these challenges within the context of gig economy (Taylor and Amir,

2015). This is mainly because the particular features of gig work⁶ tend to hamper also the collective organisation of gig workers, and hence the development of social dialogue as an *effective instrument* for the promotion of decent work and social justice (Hayter, 2011), as well as growth at the national level (EurWORK, 2017; European Parliament, 2017).

According to the ILO (2013b, p.5), social dialogue is a term that "*describes the involvement of workers, employers and governments in decision-making on employment and workplace issues*". Against a background of increasing digitalisation and the rise of the gig economy, the literature addresses the challenges to social dialogue mostly in the framework of the situation of workers' and employers' organisations. It is reported in literature that in recent years employers' and workers' organisations in Europe have been under growing pressure to adapt their organisational structure as well as their activities to the changing needs of the world of work (Brandl and Lehr 2016). Several unions have made significant efforts and adaptations to include those in newer forms of work (OECD, 2015). Adaptations have included, for instance, reaching out to platform workers such as the case of the metalworkers' union IG Metall in Germany or opening up to emerging business interests such as in the United Kingdom, where a new industry association – SEUK has been established aiming to represent a significant portion of the emerging gig economy businesses. Similar cases have not been detected in Greece, as explained in more detailed below.

Besides mobilising in the physical world, workers in the gig economy have been active in connecting with one another, organising around issues through digital platform-based networks of employees. In the United States, the team behind *Turkopticon*, an online community of Mechanical Turk gig workers, created a web platform called *Dynamo* that focuses specifically on collective action (Bergvall- Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2014). Also, workers with traditional employer–employee relationships as well as gig workers are using platforms like *Coworker.org* to test early forms of digital *employee network-building* via *user-generated petition campaigns*.

Besides these promising examples, there is evidence in the reviewed literature of gig workers resorting to *cooperative models* found in the *social and solidarity economy*. The recent emergence of *platform cooperatives* (digital platforms that are collectively owned and governed by the people who depend on and participate in them) is a first significant step in this direction. Studies show that *worker-owners* of these cooperatives share risks and benefits and negotiate better contracts, while being in a position to impact decision-making on how the platform is organised and managed (Esim and Katajamaki, 2017). More generally, what is stressed in the literature is the need for governments, regulators, and social partners to rethink the role of labour organisation, collective organisation and collective action in a world where

⁶ Such as varied and unstable working patterns, lack of physical face-to-face interaction between fellow workers as a common workplace is lacking and tasks are performed individually, and highly competitive methods of work allocation using rating mechanism that put workers in direct competition with each other.

the concepts of *employer*, *employee*, *working time*, and *place of work* become increasingly blurred (Drahokoupil and Fabo, 2016; Farrell and Greig, 2016). In such a context: *"the challenge of organising the collective voice of informal workers and those outside of established employment relationships, and the need to build broad-based coalitions with organisations with similar interests, such as cooperatives, user groups, traders' associations and other civil society, membership-based organisations are becoming a major issue"* (Páramo and Vega, 2017; p.3). This argument fully resonates with the Greek case, where the need for broad-based consensus stands out as a pressing predicament for social partners as they seek to come to terms with the gig economy challenges (see section 3.4 below).

2 - Gig economy during and after the crisis: economic opportunity or disruption?

Since 2009, Greece has become the epicenter of a series of crises with considerable socio-economic and humanitarian repercussions: the economic and unemployment crisis, the Eurozone crisis and, more recently, the migration/refugee crisis. In terms of economic impacts, over the early crisis years, Greece experienced a sharp decline in its GDP from 241,990.4€ million in 2008 (when the economic crisis first started) to million 176,022.7€ million in 2015.⁷ At the same time, the Greek unemployment rate rapidly increased from 7.8 per cent in 2008 to 24.9 per cent in 2015,⁸ while youth unemployment reached almost 50 per cent. It should be mentioned that the unemployment figures obscure the strikingly high unemployment levels among people with disabilities, which was more than double the national jobless rate of 23 per cent (ANED, 2015/2016). "The sudden growth in unemployment", Visvizi (2016) argues, *"followed by sudden loss in disposable income level, and accompanied by a disintegrating state administration means that no social provision exists for those in need; and the numbers are growing. The private sector, swamped by excessive taxation, operating in an inflexible labor market framework, under conditions of a liquidity squeeze, cannot absorb the unemployed. Therefore, as the crisis continues, amidst political instability at home and abroad, the resources at the disposal of families dwindle. In this view, the degree of social deprivation is bound to increase."* Overall, as fiscal consolidation measures were the primary priority for Greek policy-makers throughout the entire crisis period following policy directions of the relevant memoranda of understanding signed with the country's international creditors, limited attention was paid to calls for targeted social measures to cater to those vulnerable and most affected by the country's multiple crises (Mexi, 2018).

Faced with rising unemployment and shrinking incomes (plus overtaxation of private property as part of the set of measures imposed on Greece by the foreign creditors), a considerable part

⁷ Eurostat. http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=nama_10_gdp&lang=en.

⁸ Eurostat. http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en.

of the Greek population (homeowners) turned into digital platforms, such as Airbnb, to make a living or for pocket money (Goranitis, 2016). Due to its popularity, Airbnb has become an emblematic case of the gig or sharing economy in Greece. During 2017, 1.370.000 tourists who visited Greece had booked a place on Airbnb. Based on *Inside Airbnb data* (see Poutetsi, 2018), there are nowadays 5,127 listings in Athens at an average nightly rate of 55€. About 4,268 or 83.2 per cent of these involves entire houses or apartments, 15.8 per cent (808) private rooms and only 1 per cent (51) shared rooms. As the data shows, *Airbnb* has become a widespread and lucrative economic activity for many Greeks. In particular, according to a study conducted by the Athens University of Economics, in Athens *Airbnb* has brought approximately €69 million to individuals throughout the city. About 73 per cent of Airbnb's hosts are not employed in standard jobs, while 28 per cent state that the income coming from *Airbnb* is a good supplement; they have thus resorted to *Airbnb* for pocket money. A case study on Airbnb in Athens, involving in-depth interviews with 15 hosts, shows that financial resources are the main motives for host engagement (Lemonis, 2015); yet, the study also finds that hosts resorted to *Airbnb* not only as a financial opportunity (that is, a way of generating extra income) but also as an opportunity to socialise with and befriend international travelers as well as explore Athens in a way they had not before (Rinne, 2015).

Besides being an important source for income generation for individual Greeks during hard economic times, Airbnb has become an "ecosystem" or a marketplace of supporting companies. It has thus contributed to opening *business opportunities* for smaller platform or physical companies (e.g. *Eazybnb*, *Flipkey*, *Housetrip*, *Home Rentality*, and *Homeaway*),⁹ which act as intermediaries between guests and hosts of Airbnb or provide services that Airbnb does not. These include cleaning services, transportation services (e.g. *Hopwavecustomer*), checking, property management and even pricing advice for property owners (e.g. *Discoveroom*). These platforms have created new jobs especially for people out of work.

Yet alongside new opportunities, Airbnb has also presented new threats. It has thus been seen as a prime example of a market *disruptor*, in that it has considerably transformed the market for accommodations in several Greek cities (Guttentag, 2013), rivaling traditional industries such as hotels and real estate agencies. Moreover, as an increasing number of properties are now being used for Airbnb accommodations, there are not enough left for residents. This has resulted in increasing the cost of living in Athens - as the examples of other cities across the globe (Barcelona, New York, etc) also show (Badcock, 2017; Gutiérrez et al, 2017; Santolli, 2017).¹⁰ Overall, while supporters of such disruptive innovations in the burgeoning literature

⁹ Some of these platforms are likely to be co-host or management companies that manage Airbnb listing for hosts, either through the Airbnb platform itself (co-hosts), or outside of it.

¹⁰ At the same time, Airbnb established its *Office of Healthy Tourism* with the mandate to address issues of overtourism in cities and to "foster initiatives that drive economic growth in communities, empower destinations

argue that *Airbnb* can yield positive outcomes such as the empowerment of ordinary people as well as efficiency and lower environmental costs, critics attack digital platforms of the type of Airbnb for being more about *economic self-interest* rather than *sharing*; and for being exploitative and predatory (Schor, 2011; 2014). Along these lines, there are those who fiercely argue that Airbnb in Greece, as in other countries, is increasingly creating a new informal economy of uninsured workers, as entire professions—cab drivers, cleaners, etc.—are passing into a new grey market—unregulated, tax-free, and uninsured.

As our research has found, Airbnb's growing commercialisation and popularity has triggered both *first and second-level changes*. These include: hostile rhetoric on the part of the traditional social partner organisations in the hotel industry, new laws to regulate the sector in light of growing tax avoidance by Airbnb hosts, and *new opportunities for mobilisation and interest representation* among Airbnb hosts as well as professional groups of people with similar interests.

3 - Key first- and second-level changes: a critical assessment

To begin off, it should be emphasised that in terms of first-level (ideational and cognitive) changes, there is evidence of a lack of considerable attention to the concepts of *gig economy and work* in Greek public discourses. This is to be contrasted to the international experience which shows that the gig economy has been subject to significant amounts of political discussion and contention in Europe and elsewhere. As already discussed, Airbnb has attracted most attention in Greece due to its prevalence and size, followed by *Uber* (which has now suspended most of its service) and the ride-hailing app *Beat* (the almost Greek equivalent platform to Uber) in the transport sector. But public attention to these individual platforms has so far come far away from a more in-depth realisation and conceptual understanding of what the *gig or sharing economy* actually is and what it entails in terms of economic and labour market repercussions (as the semi-structured interviews with social partners and policy stakeholders, which we have conducted as part of our study, reveal). Below, the specific cases of Airbnb and Uber are presented, looking particularly at the specific policy and regulatory responses observed at the second level analytical focus.

3.1. The specific case of *Airbnb*

Media reports, as well as lively debates at hotel, travel and tourism conferences, have kept the spotlight on Airbnb's growth and success in Athens and several Greek cities in parallel with accusations of tax evasion being leveled at both Airbnb (the platform) and property owners. Concerning first-level impacts, media and policy discourses in Greece have particularly

from major cities to emerging destinations, and support environmental sustainability" (see: <https://www.airbnb.com/citizen/officeofhealthytourism/>).

focused on the unequal tax treatment between hotels and residential properties rented for the short-term and how this distorts competition notably in terms of prices (similar discourses raised in other countries see, e.g., Horn and Merante, 2017). During the duration of our research, no particular public (including media) and social partner attention was detected on the labour issues pertaining the operation of the big Airbnb ecosystem in Greece. Thus, the fact that a considerable number of people seem to work in the rental economy of Airbnb under conditions of informal employment and undeclared work has gone largely unnoticed (on these issues, see Schor, 2014).

So far, tax evasion and the provision of services by unlicensed operators has been the primary aspect tackled by policy-makers and regulators - an aspect also largely raised by hotel owners. As argued by an interviewed representative of a social partner organisation: *“Neither the social dialogue includes Airbnb’s phenomenon nor the new law reformations about sharing economy’s accommodation sector, since it mainly regulates the taxes, without touching neither the issues of labor nor home and neighborhood protection”*. The growth of Airbnb accommodation has led to Greek hotels losing €12 million overnight stays, which translates to €554 million less in revenue - accounting for 15,000 job losses per year from the hotel sector and a reduction in taxes of up to € 350 million per year from the Greek economy (Greek Travel Pages, 2015). As representatives from social partner organisations in the hotel industry have said, the sharing economy need not be considered anymore as an alternative minor activity, but as a large economic activity generating high turnover and working in parallel with the licensed sector (ibid). In seeking to address this development, from early June 2016, the Greek Tourism Ministry, following similar legislation imposed in Germany, introduced a cash tax on Airbnb-style rentals and it has also threatened to fine those owners who do not register the properties they advertise on Airbnb as businesses (*Keep Talking Greece, 2016*).

Main legislation (second-level changes)

In 2016, a regulative framework regarding short-term leases through online platforms was introduced by virtue of article 111 of Law 4446/2016 (Government Gazette Bulletin A’ 240/22.12.2016). Article 111 of said law is titled *“Arrangements for short-term rental of properties in the context of the sharing economy” (Πυθμίσεις για τη βραχυχρόνια μίσθωση ακινήτων στο πλαίσιο της οικονομίας του διαμοιρασμού)*.¹¹ Greece thus became among the first countries to regulate short-term home rentals (Povich, 2014).

Important definitions provided by article 111:

- A *sharing economy* is considered to be any model where digital platforms create an open market for the temporary use of goods or services that are often provided by individuals.

¹¹ The law sets a series of strict conditions which must be met cumulatively in order for property rental to be lawful. These conditions prevent the lessor from acquiring a commercial capacity through the provision of organised accommodation services (Felouka, 2018).

- *Digital platforms* are electronic, bilateral or multilateral markets where two or more user groups communicate via internet with the mediation of a platform manager facilitating a transaction between them.

The date of entry into force of these rules was set for 01.02.2017. Specific provisions were amended and enhanced recently by virtue of articles 83 and 84 of Law 4472/2017 (Government Gazette Bulletin A' 74/19.05.2017). Parliament ratified the bill after Airbnb refused to turn over personal data of property owners registered with the online platform and customers. The new law requires that property owners who use digital platforms to lease accommodation to tourists for short periods pay up to 45 per cent in tax on their income, with the purpose of boosting state funds.¹² Though some analysts have warned that the measure might end up discouraging potential visitors from visiting Greece and increasing the appeal of rival destinations, representatives of social partner organisations in the real estate sector have supported the new arguing that it can potentially bring "*order and balance in a situation which until recently was totally anarchic*" (Kathimerini, 2018a). Yet, grievances have been expressed concerning the absence of a social dialogue framework to guide the legislative changes brought forward; as one of our interviewees stressed (representative of a Greek tourist organisation): "*Social dialogue has not been used effectively overall in the process of enacting reforms in the sharing economy's accommodation sector, since only a small part of the social partners which are involved with Airbnb actually collaborated with the government in devising these reforms*", a point also shared by an interviewed trade unionist in the sector of tourism who also remarked that "*shadow economy-activities in the platform-type business have created in Greece an unfair competition context*".

3.2. The specific case of Uber

In the transport sector, Uber has given rise to much media attention. Uber in Greece was launched in Athens in 2014 and until recently it ran two services i.e. UberX (launched in 2015) with private drivers and UberTAXI with professional taxi drivers. In April 2018, Uber announced that it would suspend its licensed service UberX (with private drivers) after the approval of new legislation which imposes stricter regulation on Uber and Uber-like platforms.

¹² In the legislation the Finance Ministry stipulates categories of tax rates that will be borne by the property owners profiting from the tourism platforms' sharing economy. Specifically, owners receiving up to 12,000 Euros in revenues will be taxed 15 per cent, while others receiving 12,001-35,000 and amounts greater than 35,001 Euros will be taxed 35 per cent and 45 per cent respectively. The new tax rates are imposed as of 1.1.2018. Airbnb-style hosts, defined as 'operators', will be required to enter the registry of the Independent Authority for Public Revenue, submit a short-term residence declaration for each tenant, enroll in the short-term residential property data system, inform the Deposits and Loans Fund for income attributable to unknown beneficiaries as well as provide information on tenants and duration of stay. The decision underlined that there can only be one 'operator' per property. The law, which foresees fines of up to 5,000 Euros for violators, was also signed by the head of Greece's Independent Authority for Public Revenue (Felouka, 2018).

Main legislation (second-level changes)

The new Law 4530/2018, titled "Arrangements for transportation issues and other provisions" (*Πυθμίσεις θεμάτων μεταφορών και άλλες διατάξεις*) foresees among others that e-platforms and apps, offering taxi services as 'intermediaries' operate as transport companies, requiring them to enter three-year contracts with licensed taxi drivers and outlining the "*exact terms of use of the brokerage service as applicable, the data of owners or drivers of the vehicles, vehicle registration certificates and special driving licenses for vehicle drivers*". In effect, the bill breaks away with past provisions that aimed to liberate the taxi market and allowed among others tourist agencies to lease cars and drivers at will.

The new law foresees harsh fines. Should taxi service providers operate without a license issued by the Transport Ministry, they will be fined up to €100,000 and the driver will have his professional license revoked for two years. At the same time, vehicle owners "*cooperating illegally with a mediating taxi service will be subject to an administrative fine of 5,000 Euros per vehicle*". The new law obliges companies active in the sector to move forward issuing a license if the electronic or telephone brokerage service is the main activity of the company. This new legislative move, initially aimed at hindering Uber's market presence, has also impacted a great number of taxi service providers collaborating with individual drivers. One such company is the popular ride-hailing app *Beat* (launched in 2011 by a Greek entrepreneur). The service provided by Beat in Athens is similar to UberTAXI, which Uber still maintains. In particular, once governmental intentions became known, the founder of Beat launched an online campaign to stop the government from drafting the new bill with over 30,000 supporters signing the online petition (Greek Travel Pages, 2017a).

It should also be stressed that the new law was preceded by angry demonstrations by traditional yellow taxi drivers (even attacking a vehicle they believed to be an Uber driver) who took to the streets of Athens to protest against Uber and Beat for taking away their business. Several media reports of the time suggested the government acted under pressure from traditional taxi drivers and their powerful and influential organisations, while, once the new law was passed, Greece's major political parties in the opposition accused the Transport Ministry for hampering innovation and entrepreneurship. In response, Transport Ministry officials underlined that the bill was in line with EU legislation and a recent European Court ruling placing emphasis on the need to of the new law to address potential tax evasion and avoidance practices on the part of digital platforms (Kathimerini, 2018b).

As with Airbnb, and contrary to what has been happening in other European countries, no particular attention (policy or otherwise) was given to issues of employment rights, working conditions and social protection faced by Uber drivers. The observed almost non-contention around critical labour questions pertaining to gig workers in Greece and how to regulate them - but also on the potential of new job opportunities that could be generated with the growth of

the gig economy (a considerable aspect to look at especially for a country with one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe) - is difficult to decipher unless one looks inter alia more closely at the historical roots and evolution of the Greek model of social partnership and trade unionism; and more particularly at the persistence of strong legacies that seem to have remained salient even after the emergence of digital platforms in Greece (as explained in section 3.4 below).

3.3. Responses of workers and employers

Second-level changes also encompass the degree of change of social partners' mobilisations and representation tactics and strategies. As stressed in section 2 above, the spread of flexible, non-standard work in the gig economy raises concerns about respecting freedom of association, workers' representation and collective bargaining. In the case of social partners, the literature touches on the need for workers' and employers' organisations to anticipate and adapt their organising tactics and collective bargaining approaches to the multifaceted demands of digital gig economy and work (Vandaele, 2018).

The reviewed literature sheds light on *three main approaches* to organising gig workers¹³ that worth our attention.¹⁴

- The first concerns the *legal approach*, which entails unions contesting worker *misclassification* and aiming to include gig workers in existing employment arrangements and entitlements. Examples of this kind include the efforts led by GMB - one of the largest trade unions in the United Kingdom - which resulted in over 30,000 drivers being granted access to basic employment benefits, including minimum wage and leave pay (McGoogan and Yeomans, 2016). For GMB as well as for the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB)¹⁵ litigation is one crucial strategy to empower precarious workers and to show that there is no real distinction between those working via platforms and those who are not (Roberts, 2018).
- The second approach concerns *alliance formation* i.e. forging associations and alliances aimed at providing support services to isolated gig workers (such as lobbying on behalf of gig workers). Examples of this type of approach include the Independent Drivers Guild (IDG)¹⁶ in New York which was established through the association of

¹³ These vary across geographies, depending on the political context in which they operate.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive examination of the issues of collective voice and organising gig workers see particularly Johnston and Land-Kazlauskas 2019.

¹⁵ A new and dynamic union, established in 2012 and now with about 2,500 members, which represents mainly low paid migrant workers, such as outsourced cleaners and security guards, workers in the gig economy, such as bicycle couriers and Uber drivers, and foster care workers.

¹⁶ Representing 50,000 New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission-Licensed Uber drivers (Scheiber, 2017).

several trade unions, including Aerospace Workers (IAM) and The International Association of Machinists. The alliance was established with the aim of forging communication channels between drivers employed in the gig economy and the corporations. Through this alliance, IDG has sought to influence five key issues, namely: a minimum per minute / per mile rate (which would result minimum earnings of about \$250 for an eight-hour day), a cap on the number of TLC licenses (linked to number of trips, as a measure to limit competition in the labour market), a mandated tipping option, and the right for a driver to appeal if the company undercharges or takes away money (for example, following a passenger complaint). The outcome of IDG efforts was a five-year neutrality and recognition agreement between IAM and Uber. IDG's direct engagement with Uber resulted in the following: a works council (i.e. a representative structure with the aim to promote consultation between management and worker representatives within an enterprise) was set up, where the drivers represented by the IDG are able to raise and discuss issues; IDG has also been given access to the pool of Uber drivers enabling them to mobilise and organise.

- Finally, the third approach concerns efforts for *advocacy* (through lobbying, campaigning and influencing) and *regulatory reform* aimed at putting pressure for introducing new legislation at national and local levels. Successful examples at local levels include the Teamsters in Seattle who were able to pressure for new legislation extending collective bargaining to include gig workers in the transport sector (most notably Lyft and Uber) (Kessler, 2017).

Looking more closely at the Greek case, we find no concrete initiatives falling in neither of the three approaches described above. At the time of writing, no major *organising initiatives* have been taken (initiatives to organise digital gig workers) by trade unions to influence workplace politics and conditions in the gig economy; and no major *knowledge brokering activities*¹⁷ have been initiated. Furthermore, no specific *regulatory initiatives* or *collective agreements* have been undertaken by unions to specifically address the gig economy and its effects on labour and social protection rules. Overall, Greek unions have not yet sought to engage with groups of gig workers as part of a *renewal strategy* to expand representation to non-standard workers (more broadly), as international evidence has sought to demonstrate in other countries (ILO, 2016a).

A more active approach in terms of *knowledge brokering* (identified as part of changes occurring at the first level of our analysis) has been taken by the big confederation of Greek employers¹⁸ and the Economic and Social Council of Greece.¹⁹ The most critical voices, as

¹⁷ For instance, activities such as training, consultancy, conferences and networking.

¹⁸ At the time of writing, the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises – SEV (the biggest organisation representing employers in Greece) had organised a conference and published a report (2017) on the future of work within the

discussed above, have been organisations representing businesses that are most directly affected by digital platforms in the transport and the hospitality and tourism industry (e.g. traditional taxi drivers, tourist accommodation enterprises, and hoteliers). Through repeated strikes and public criticism were able to increase political pressure for regulatory reforms. We could interpret their activist approach as falling fall within the third approach identified in the reviewed literature above - that of *pushing for regulatory reforms with the goal of putting forward new legislation*. Interestingly, these cases concern responses taken by *employer* (rather than worker) *organisations*, and they are explicitly aimed at curtailing what are generally perceived as negative effects of other (*but still*) *employers* in the gig economy. This corroborates the argument advanced by Kirchner and Beyer (2016) - according to which, the rise of the broader platform economy has been followed by competition between *different competition logics within capitalism* – i.e. between employers in platform capitalism and employers in conventional or mainstream capitalism operating in the same context (industry or sector).

Due to emerging intra-capitalist conflict or, as Rinne (2018) writes, *access (to assets) over ownership (of assets)* has become a new tagline - the balance of power between capital and labour found in regular employment has also been disrupted. Thompson already in the early 00s introduced the Disconnected Capitalism Thesis (2003) to refer to the growing divergence "*between what capital is seeking from employees ... and what it finds necessary to enforce in the realm of employment relations [employment relationships]*" (Thompson, 2003; p.264). Under this view, firms - under pressures of financialisation²⁰ and flexibilisation²¹ (Rubery et al 2016) - have prioritized strategies of delayering, downsising and divestment; and they have been retreated from investments in human capital with consequential implications for the quality of employment in terms of career development, job security, and pensions.²² There is a

wider context of digitalisation of society and the economy. The report sheds light on the confusion surrounding several related concepts, namely, the 'digital economy', 'sharing economy', 'collaborative economy', 'gig economy', 'crowdwork', and 'gig work', aiming to bring some clarity and effectuate first-level ideational changes among its members. The report also stresses the need for more targeted awareness-raising for employers to harness the impending effects of the digital revolution on the labour market and the economy.

¹⁹ In this regard, worth mentioning is the Conference on *Social Dialogue and the Future of Work* organised jointly by the Economic and Social Council of Greece - OKE (comprising of representatives of Greece's major social partner organisations), the ILO, and the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions in Athens on 23-24 November 2017. The aim of the conference was to trigger a more dynamic and continuous dialogue between government, employer and worker representatives on the transformational challenges related to the digitalisation of societies and economies, and to promote the sharing of good practices. The debates around the *disruptiveness* of the gig or platform economy were identified as key issues of concern along with the need for more active participation of social partners in the design and decision-making affecting the future of work.

²⁰ The process of financialisation refers to profits increasingly generated through financial channels and investments rather than production activities or productive value-added services as financial deregulation has enabled more volatile investments (Findlay et al, 2017).

²¹ A concept gained momentum globally already in the 1980s, during periods of severe unemployment and intense competition (Benassi, 2013; Keune and Serrano, 2014; Grimshaw et al, 2016; Rubery et al, 2016).

²² According to Thompson (2013), financialisation processes have involved significant implications for work and

large body of research (Grimshaw et al, 2016; Fitzgerald et al, 2012; Kalleberg, 2011; Pollert and Charlwood, 2009; Standing, 2011) focusing on how such practices function to undermine the capacity of employees to influence matters. For instance, casual workers such as crowdworkers may fear the termination of their contract or having reduced hours after voicing grievances.²³ At the same time, tensions between workers and employers have been amplified.

Though the Greek case shows no tensions between labour interests and platforms as is the case, for example, with Uber and Uber taxi drivers in the United Kingdom, there is evidence that the spread of *Airbnb* has provided certain groups with a new impetus for organising themselves for collective representation and discussions. Hence, *Airbnb* has led to the emergence of a new collective organisation in Greece – the Association of Sharing Economy in Greece - S.O.DIA. Founded in 2017 in order to represent owners, sub-tenants, and third-party managers of Airbnb/type accommodation, S.O.DIA. participated in the discussions with the Greece's Independent Authority for Public Revenue (AADE) preceding the introduction of the regulatory initiatives taken in 2017. In their public announcements at that time, S.O.DIA seemed to align its efforts with AADE on the need to protect the market from monopolies, stressing also that: " *...The sharing economy has a positive contribution to the economy as it promotes the concept of Greek hospitality, strengthens local products and businesses and makes use of assets that otherwise would remain inactive*" (Greek Travel Pages, 2017b).

Besides the emergence of S.O.DIA, so far we find no evidence of grassroots initiatives taken by people working in the gig economy to achieve *effective representation* and to build *collective agency*. In particular, we find no effort for unionising Greek gig workers, as elsewhere.²⁴ Yet, all these are happening against a background of reported dissatisfaction about unstable working hours, physical exhaustion, and time pressure on the part of people working in the wider Airbnb business.²⁵

employment relationship dynamics. In particular, as Lazonick and O'Sullivan (2000) write, the demand for short-term financial results expects flexibility with the possibility that workers are laid off. It also involves a preference for individualistic performance-related pay systems (made easier with the algorithmic systems of the platforms in the gig economy), rather than firm-specific skills, and hostility towards union bargaining (Jacoby, 2005).

²³ Grimshaw et al (2016) discuss how flexible and non-standard employment arrangements are enabled by the existence four protective gaps concerning regulation (lack of standards), enforcement of existing regulation (lack of resources for monitoring agencies or to cover employment tribunal fees), social protection (lack of access to unemployment benefits and pensions), and representation (lack of access to union membership).

²⁴ As, for instance, the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), which provides one of the best-known examples of new union formation for gig workers in various industries. Mags Dewhurst, a courier and union organiser with IWGB, stresses that IWGB's practices involve ground-up organising and rank-and-file engagement, which are divergent from well-established unions; also, that unions with experience organising *non-standard workers* possess an organising skillset that is transferrable to new realities of gig work (Braithwaite, 2017).

²⁵ See, for example, the article *Airbnb: «Είναι σαν μία κανονική δεύτερη δουλειά χωρίς ωράριο»* published in the newspaper *Kathimerini* (2018c), which presents the true stories of Greek young persons (mostly, graduates) who

3.4. Past pathologies and present limitations

To capture the salience of variables or factors mediating Greek unions' and employers' low-to-moderate responses (vis-à-vis the social partners' more active responses in other European countries e.g. the United Kingdom or Germany to some extent) especially to the new realities of gig work, a more in-depth understanding of certain national peculiarities pertaining to the Greek model of social partnership is needed, as explained in more detail below. In particular, three key issues were mentioned during the interviews:

(i). The type of the Greek model of social partnership and the state prior to the rise of the gig economy

An historical look at the nature and evolution of the Greek model of social partnership helps to understand the difficulty of adapting to the concept and realities of the gig economy and work, while also hinting at potential solutions. In the literature, it is generally maintained that excessive reliance on party links, the domination of civil society by political parties, and networks of clientelism have contributed to the formation of "disjointed corporatism" (Lavdas, 1997; 2005) as the main form of interest representation. As Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou (2015; p.223) write, *"although trade unions challenged sometimes significant efforts of marketisation in the pre-crisis period through strike action (e.g proposing social security reforms in 2003), they remained among the main stakeholders of the mainstream political and institutional order in Greece, reflecting the public discourse and perception of trade unions as 'political dinosaurs'."* These specific challenges and shortcomings have also been associated with the social dialogue's regression over the crisis years (ILO, 2013) and particularly with the observed weakness of mainstream trade unions to adequately address the austerity challenge and its adverse implications on workers (Greer and Doellgast, 2013).

(ii). Trade unions' "business as usual" and the lack of a social dialogue framework to address emerging problems

Trade unions seem to continue to operate in a more traditional framework when it comes to labour issues associated with the gig economy. During the timeframe of our research we did not detect any evidence of trade unions opening up to workers in the gig economy. Overall, the result of that practice has been - as one interviewee working in the Airbnb business said: *"an emerging group of gig workers most of them working informally in the booming*

have been working in the wider Airbnb business in Athens either as co-hosts or super-hosts (undertaking several tasks such as managing bookings, connecting with guests, contracting cleaners, etc.), or as drivers (collaborating with hotels and car owners renting their cars via apps). While describing their work as *"a real full-time job without fixed working hours"*, they have also been complaining about physical fatigue due to unpredictable scheduling, inconsistent earnings, unreliable long-term employment prospects - the latter preventing them for making major life decisions, such as that of starting a family.

Airbnb business that are left alone, vulnerable and unprotected". This "inclusiveness deficit" could be seen through different perspectives. To begin with, trade union responses vis-a-vis gig workers may be understood against a wider context of trade union limited interest and capacity to adequately reach out to precarious workers, as past experience shows. Mutatis mutandis, the case of migrant and young workers bears certain similarities with the case of the gig workers, a point brought forward by an interviewed journalist. As argued, migrant workers from Africa and Asia were overrepresented during 1990s and mid 2000s in the booming industries of construction and agriculture. Nevertheless, this new reserve army of labour remained without union representation, which, in turn, resulted in the development of direct employer control leading to exploitation at work.

Another explanation may relate to the perceived (on the part of trade unions) costly allocation of resources to address the needs of gig workers. That is to say that, the low numbers of gig workers as part of the general Greek workforce (though figures to estimate concrete numbers are lacking) seem to explain the low interest on the part of the trade unions to commit resources to gig workers' organisation and protection. According to an interviewed trade unionist active at national level: *"This [the situation of the gig workers] is a tiny problem comparing to all the other issues that Greek employees face."* *"sharing economy's accommodation sector employees must be few in number, not declared to public authorities and difficult to be identified.* Along similar lines, another interviewed trade unionist in the tourist sector said: *"sharing economy's accommodation sector employees must be few in number, not declared to public authorities and difficult to be identified..."*

Moreover, the lack of high interest on the part of trade unions to mobilise and protect the precarious workforce in the gig economy may also be seen as part of a wider disillusionment that emerged after the onset of the economic crisis and the 2010 bail-out agreement with Greece's creditors. As one interviewed expert stressed: *"Especially during the early crisis years, the mainstream trade unions were not sufficiently able to impede the reduction of wage earners' income .. while the overall resilience of social dialogue came under pressure.."*

Lastly, an interviewed expert critically assessing the role of social partners more broadly, while noting the stance of the trade unions in particular, referred to the lack of an efficient social dialogue framework to address the issues at stake: *"new topics are not discussed or debated in social dialogues' context, although they should, in order to provide a way out of economic crisis for young people and other vulnerable people... there is also the issue of power resources of the unprotected flexible labour force in the gig economy in Greece, or rather, their lack of them"*. The latter point seems to relate with what Rainnie and Ellem (2006) have argued namely, that the reorientation of trade union identities, approaches and strategies is strongly related to certain political realities and changes in the political balance of

power in Greece. This observation is essential for a country with a heavily politicized social partnership environment.

(iii). Fragmentation and the traditional absence of a genuine and intense consensus-seeking culture

Another factor behind the low-level responses of social partner organisations in Greece in terms of addressing the contentious labour issues associated with the rise of the gig economy may be related to their traditionally fragmented nature. A plethora of associations and groups has divided employers and employees into interest groups lacking coherence and strong organisational resources, preventing in several instances their effective emancipation from state structures and clientelistic politics. The effects of fragmentation on policy-making become more complicated if one considers that Greek political culture – under which the evolution of social partnership is subsumed - has traditionally been characterized by the lack of broad-based consensus and conciliatory mechanisms to facilitate substantial policy reform. The reasons for such an absence need to be traced back to the historical evolution of the Greek polity characterised by major cleavages along political lines, economic instability, and political radicalism. Civil war during the 20th century and a lack of consensual political culture deprived the country's social partners from a critically important platform on which they could base their partnership once formal institutional changes had been introduced. Reforms to institutionalise collective bargaining and structures conducive to social dialogue in the 1980s and 1990s have undoubtedly had some positive impact on Greek industrial relations, facilitating ad hoc instances of consensus. Yet, radical shifts and departures from the past cannot be fully discerned if one looks at recent responses to the gig-economy developments.

Currently a broad-based consensus on a joint strategy for a socially inclusive economic growth approach to preparing for and managing the gig economy is lacking. Such an approach could be based on a consensual rapprochement between the social partners and the gig economy actors. It could also outline a range of policy priorities to profit from both business innovation and the employment opportunities offered through the gig economy, while seeking to combat the problems of precarity and inequality in the labour market. And it could put forward specific reforms to reorganise work and welfare towards a more sustainable growth model, as Greece is entering its post-crisis era. As international experience shows, social dialogue could play a key role in this respect (Mexi, 2019). As characteristically stressed by one of our interviewees (representative of an organisation active in the tourist and real estate sectors): *“The scope of social dialogue concerning gig economy is limited at the moment, but needs to be strengthened, because new legislative reforms should definitely be implemented in the future. Collective bargaining and social dialogue will gain prominence in the future only*

through the wide consultation of all the social partners, but this will require time and planning.”

Concluding remarks

Overall, our study corroborates an emerging argument in the literature that digital labour platforms are not only a matter of technological innovation and change. Context matters. The advance of gig economy and work should be contextualised within distinct societies. Responses to gig-economy developments in Greece can considerably be shaped by the historical legacies of the social and political framework in place. In particular, our findings indicate that, as the country grappled with economic crisis and disillusionment, past legacies have persisted and they possibly constitute one key factor hindering the introduction of major reforms to address both job growth and innovation opportunities as well as the labour challenges pertaining to the gig economy and work.

More particularly, while there is evidence of low-to-moderate first-level (ideational/cognitive) change, any policy-oriented changes at the second level aiming to address questions related to gig work and how to regulate it were not found to exist. More particularly, during the timeframe of our research we detected no considerable evidence on social partners' role in the formulation and implementation of reforms to solve specific 'labour problems', those evolving for instance out of the rise of flexible, precarious, casual and non-standard employment in the gig economy (especially with regard to the platforms operating in Greece's expanding tourism sector). There have been no attempts to formulate national plans or strategies to maximise opportunities and reduce risks. The fact that recent legal interventions and discourses have primarily addressed tax-related issues and not the more controversial and demanding labour-related issues - concerning for instance the status of gig workers or their working conditions and the quality of jobs offered via digital platforms - may point to the presence of historical factors that are related to the country's specific institutional and political conditions and the Greek model of social partnership and trade unionism. It can be argued that these factors have traditionally contributed to blocking the re-articulation of policy preferences along more comprehensive transformative policies that could eventually be used to address the needs of groups in the workforce lacking any mobilisation resources, effective rights, or the ability to exercise more political pressure.²⁶

Summing up, in our study we have sought to show that, what can actually explain the social partners' ability to make the most of the gig economy is the salience of mediating contextual variables and path dependencies. Yet, despite despite the persistence of past legacies,

²⁶ In this regard it could be argued that the "reform technology" (Monastiriotes and Antoniadis, 2009) of the country to address the emerging gig-economy developments has proven weak.

possibilities to discontinue from old ways of doing things do exist for Greek social partners as long as they come to realise the significance of strengthening their organisational abilities and making social dialogue more inclusive and representative as well as enhancing their policy responses as a result. As the literature on historical institutionalism (Beckert, 1999; Garud and Karnøe, 2001) indicates, the rise of norm entrepreneurs can effectively interrupt legacies and lead to transformative discontinuities in their path; thereby, transcending adverse institutional histories on the ground. Currently, and in anticipation of pathbreaking actors, only hindsight can tell us with certainty whether the gig economy will provide for Greece an entirely revolutionised trajectory of economic growth or instead an incremental evolution of economic activity that becomes absorbed in prevailing social partnership legacies without any paradigmatic change. In a country emerging from the crisis with a highly traumatised economy and society, policy-makers, employers and workers need to understand the importance of leveraging the opportunities of the gig economy into innovation combined with socially inclusive growth. Only in this way, they will not allow continuities with the past becoming the wrong blueprints of the future.

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