FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON THE PLATFORMISATION OF CARE WORK IN EUROPEAN CITIES

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14.00 – 15.30

SESSION 2: ON THE RISE AND REPERCUSSIONS OF PLATFORM CAPITALISM

CHAIR: ANKE STRÜVER
ROOM: TAL 007

Time, space, reproduction: On the long history of platform labour
Moritz Altenried, Mira Wallis, Humboldt-Universität Berlin

Digital platforms are commonly portrayed as innovative and novel, disrupting the established normalities of wage labour and 'standard employment'. While certain elements, such as algorithmic management, are certainly new, the emphasis on the disruptive character of digital platforms overshadows the long and pre-digital history of many crucial elements of platform labour in the present.

Contemporary online gig work, which enables workers – especially women with care responsibilities – to work from home and combine unpaid reproductive work with digital wage labour, need to be situated within the long history of home-based labour. This socio-spatial model is at least as old as capitalism itself, originating with the cottage industry and putting-out system, which organised the labour of mostly women and children into an "external department of the factory" (Marx) through piecework and middlemen.

Many of the historical conjunctures of home-based labour have been driven by technological innovations that entered private households. One example is the sewing machine, commercially available for home use since the late 19th century, which played a key role in the expansion of the sweating system in the garment industry. Another is the personal computer, which, from the 1970s onward, facilitated the rise of teleworking. From this perspective, the platform represents one in a series of attempts by capital to penetrate the private household as a simultaneous site of production, reproduction, and consumption.

Contemporary forms of migrant gig work in food delivery and other sectors could also be situated within a long history of hyper-flexibilised work, where piece wages or short-term contracts play a crucial role. One may think of the mobile day labourers of the feudal system as well as today's migrant day labourers in Californian gardens, kitchens or agricultural fields.

We will sketch the developments and conjunctures of home-based labour and piecework, describing them as crucial elements in the stratification, division and intensification of labour. Discussing these conjunctures as genealogies of digital platforms allows us to understand and analyse new elements of platform labour, namely the digital possibilities of automated management and control of labour at a distance. These developments further reconfigure and modulate the spatial and temporal logics of piecework and home-based work, and thus the gendered and migrant division of labour.

Our contribution situates digital platforms within the long histories of contingent and precarious labour. These histories are closely intertwined with histories of migrant and feminised labour. In such histories, precarity and contingency are the norm, and Fordist 'standard' employment, by contrast, the exception, a short period further limited by vectors of geography, gender or mobility.

Female delivers in Portugal's gig economy: Challenges, risks, and inequalities
Daniela Ferreira, Margarida Queirós, University of Lisbon

The gig economy has grown significantly in Portugal, particularly in digital platforms such as Uber, Bolt, and Glovo. While most drivers are men, a growing number of women are joining this workforce, facing gender-specific challenges. This study explores the experiences of female delivers in Portugal, focusing on safety risks, job precarity, and inequalities in opportunities. The research follows a qualitative approach, combining interviews with female delivers and an analysis of online communities where they share their experiences. Key issues explored include harassment from customers and colleagues, insecurity when working late hours, exposure to road accidents, and income disparities due to subjective rating mechanisms on platforms. Additionally, the study examines how these workers balance the flexibility promised by the gig economy with the challenges posed by the lack of labour rights and social protection. By shedding light on these experiences, this study contributes to a broader discussion on working conditions in digital platforms and gender inequalities in the sector. The findings can help inform public policies and business practices that promote greater equity and safety for women in Portugal's gig economy.

"This big shadow that we need to turn into light": How labour intermediaries moralise commodified domestic care work
Christina Mittmasser, University of Applied Sciences Geneva

Domestic care workers have long been largely invisible in labour statistics and in public and policy debates. The rise of the platform economy has exposed domestic care workers to a new, but problematic, individual visibility: to find jobs and customers, they must create digital public profiles with personal information. Accordingly, scholars emphasise that this individualised visibility poses risks to privacy and security of domestic care workers. We argue in this paper that labour market intermediaries create not only an individualised visibility of domestic care workers, but also a new collective visibility that leads to more public debate about their working conditions and societal recognition. Methodologically, our argument is based on qualitative interviews with founders and managing directors of companies who mediate domestic care work in Switzerland. Drawing on the concept and literature on market moralisation, we consider these companies to be moral entrepreneurs. Based on our interest in how they frame the social value of commodified care work, we applied a discourse-analytic perspective. We found that the moral entrepreneurs use four central narratives to highlight their societal contribution. They claim to formalise care work, increase the public recognition of care work, emancipate women and integrate migrants. Based on these findings, we discuss these moralising narratives as ambivalent: although they reify a problematic feminisation, migrantisation and neoliberalisation

of domestic care work, they enhance the collective visibility of care workers. Subsequently, the increased visibility might contribute to put working conditions in domestic care on the public agenda and lead to positive change.

THURSDAY, 03.07.2025

09.00 – 10.30

SESSION 3: GLOBAL ENTANGLEMENTS OF PLATFORMISATION PROCESSES

CHAIR: KARIN SCHWITER
ROOM: HEL 063

Precarity across borders: Platformisation of domestic work in the global South and North
Fernanda Teixeira, Independent researcher from Sao Paolo

The platformisation of domestic and care work has reshaped labour dynamics globally, yet its impact varies significantly across regions. In both the global South and North, digital platforms mediate domestic work through algorithmic management, flexible scheduling and customer rating systems, yet they operate within different socio-economic and regulatory environments.

While platform-mediated care work in the global North has emerged in response to demographic shifts, austerity policies and changing household structures, in the global South platformisation often builds on pre-existing informality and reinforces long-standing labour inequalities. This paper examines how intersectional vulnerabilities shape the experiences of domestic platform workers in both contexts, highlighting commonalities and divergences in precarity, regulation and resistance strategies. A key point of comparison is labour informality.

In the global North, platformisation is often associated with the erosion of formal labour protections, as platforms circumvent employment laws and reclassify workers as independent contractors. In contrast, in much of the global South, domestic work has historically been highly informal, and platformisation is sometimes framed as a step towards partial formalisation. However, rather than fully integrating workers into regulated labour markets, platforms often create new forms of digital precarity, where formal registration depends on the willingness of individual employers rather than on structural protections.

As a result, most workers remain excluded from stable contracts, paid leave and social security. In both regions, classifying domestic workers as independent contractors is a common strategy for shifting risk to workers, limiting their access to legal protections and collective bargaining mechanisms. By comparing the lived experiences of domestic platform workers in the global South and North, this paper contributes to feminist debates on the transformation of domestic and care work under platform capitalism. While regional differences in labour market structures and regulations shape platformisation in different ways, workers in both contexts experience

common struggles related to precarity, algorithmic control and legal exclusion. This paper highlights the need for cross-regional dialogue and comparative research to better understand how platformisation is reshaping care work globally, and how workers in different regions can learn from each other's struggles.

Hype or hope? Feminist perspectives on the platformisation of domestic work in Nairobi

Sabin Bieri, University of Bern

Digitalization – understood as the "integration of digital technologies into everyday life" (Mondejar et al., 2021) – has often been pointed to as a potential avenue to improve economic outcomes for the most vulnerable, and reduce inequality. However, techno-optimism has often been proved to be a hype, rather than a hope (Friederici, 2019). The processes and mechanisms of digitalization are shaped by underlying intersectional inequalities and inequities that create the digital gender divide, as documented by feminist scholars (Stark, 2020; Wamala Larsson & Stark, 2019). As a result, efforts to use digitalization as a tool to advance sustainable development are often gender-blind, and foster exclusion and violence rather than equitable progress (Arimatsu, 2019; Fal-Dutra Santos & Pourmalek, 2022).

The presented study is a feminist exploration of how digital spaces (re-shape) employment practices in Kenya, reflecting on whether and how they could contribute to a more empowering and gender-transformative labour environment. This includes the question of how care obligations are being navigated in the gig economy in a global South context. If there is a 'care crisis' in Kenya, its nature will be very different from what we find in European ageing societies. Care obligations have to be negotiated between wage work and different degrees of subsistence. This contribution aims to explore the shift in terms of access to work and working conditions brought about by platform-mediated labour relations, and their gendered implications.

We view the concept of digital intersectionalities as the entry point to critically examining the meanings of "decent work" and "gender justice" in a rapidly shifting employment territory. Our focus is on predominately female dominated sectors such as domestic work, childcare, seasonal work in agriculture, and content mediation. Namely the latter has stirred quite some interest in Western newsrooms, as Kenya turned out to be a hub for AI content mediation. Employees in this sector are being exposed to the most horrific, dehumanizing and threatening digital content, without adequate measures to attend to their mental health as they perform this work.

The paper builds on preliminary research in the Kiberi informal settlement in Kenya, as well as a partnership and dialogue with the University of Nairobi, Pollicy Feminist Tech Collective and Kijiji Yeetu Smart Villages. We introduce the concept of digital resilience as a tool to capture and make visible the ways in which individuals and communities adapt in the face of the intersectional inequalities and challenges related to digital work and the platformized gig economy.

The rise of domestic work platforms and the transformation of migrant social reproductive labor in Madrid, Spain

Ana Santamarina Guerrero, Francisco Fernández-Trujillo Moares, Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia, *Cristina Barrial Berbén,* Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

This paper explores the growing proliferation of digital platforms in the domestic and care sectors in Madrid (Spain), leading to a dual process of 'feminization of digital labor' (Kluzik, 2022; Matescu & Ticona, 2020) and digitalization of care and reproductive work. The expansion of the platform economy, coupled with a structural crisis of social reproduction —exacerbated by the austerity policies of 2008 and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic—has been leveraged by various platforms to position themselves as key private infrastructures for social reproduction. This shift has intensified the commodification and outsourcing of reproductive labor within the broader framework of neoliberalism as an economic, social, political, and cultural project (Federici, 2012). Domestic and care work is predominantly performed by migrant workers, forming 'global care chains'. In this context, platforms offer a digitalized version of services historically associated with the informal economy and racialized, feminized labor (Chicchi & Marrone, 2024). We analyze how platform capitalism interacts with migration regulations, leading to the proliferation of a feminized migrant workforce that relies on these platforms as one of the few available employment opportunities.

Drawing on ongoing research that combines semi-structured interviews with workers employed through various domestic, care, and cleaning service platforms in Madrid (e.g. Domestico24, Sitly, Cuideo and others), as well as ethnographic work and interviews with workers in traditional structures in these sectors, this paper examines the transformations that digitalization has introduced for women engaged in domestic labor. While recognizing the heterogeneity of activities encompassed under the domestic labor umbrella, analyzing these platforms collectively allows a comprehensive understanding of the effects of the platformization of activities related to reproductive labor.

Following a mapping of emerging platforms in the domestic and care work sectors in Madrid (Spain), our paper identifies key transformations arising from digitalization. It highlights the transition from traditional forms of employment—such as direct hiring by families or recruitment through public employment services or placement agencies—to new forms of labor organization through digital platforms, as well as the coexistence of both models. We analyze the labor dimension of these transformations, focusing on work organization, the shift from live-in employment to fragmented micro-task-based models as a paradigm of precarity, and the dynamics of professionalization and de-professionalization. Overall, our research demonstrates that these 'on-demand' models increase job, economic, and personal insecurity for women working in the sector by subjecting them to increased levels of uncertainty both in terms of work volume and their relationships with clients and the platform.

CHAIR: SYBILLE BAURIEDL
ROOM: HEL 065

The private is political: Platform-mediated domestic cleaning and intersectional power hierarchies in the domestic sphere
Janne Martha Lentz, University of Graz

Platform-mediated domestic work is not only shaped by digital infrastructures and socio-economic conditions but is also situated within the domestic sphere—a space historically constructed as private, feminised, and politically neutral. This framing has long been challenged by feminist scholars, who have foregrounded the private sphere as a site of political struggle. Following this tradition, I examine how encounters between cleaners and clients unfold within the home, shaped by relations that are individually experienced yet embedded in broader structures of gender, race, and class, as well as dominant discourses surrounding domestic labour. I explore how platform mediation structures these interactions, shaping mutual expectations both in digital communication and during the first face-to-face encounter.

These encounters take place in clients' homes—spaces where power is unevenly distributed. While both parties are meeting someone from the internet for the first time, clients remain in control: they are in their own space and often hold the upper hand in negotiating the terms of the work. They oscillate between authority, discomfort, and vulnerability as they navigate the presence of a paid worker in their private home. Cleaners, by contrast, enter unfamiliar spaces with limited information, acutely aware of being judged from the outset. They therefore must navigate their own emotional responses, uncertainties, and professional self-presentations while responding to the often implicit expectations of clients about cleanliness and domesticity, managing atmospheres of indifference, surveillance, or conditional friendliness.

Drawing on interviews with both clients and cleaners using domestic labour platforms in Vienna, Austria, I highlight how intersectional power hierarchies of the platform economy are lived, negotiated, and experienced in the domestic sphere, illustrating that the feminist critique of the private as political is as relevant as ever.

Incorporating the smart home into platform capitalism
Eva Isselstein, Universität Bayreuth

Digital technologies in the home, often termed "smart homes," are increasingly built on platforms like Amazon Alexa or Google Home. These platforms are becoming a normalised part of domestic infrastructure, allowing companies to enter private spaces in ways that were previously unimaginable. While smart home users adopt these technologies with the hope of saving time through the automation of household tasks, this process must be understood in the broader context of the ongoing care crisis, which places growing (time) pressure on individuals and households (Fraser 2016). However, the widespread adoption of digital technologies in the

home is not a frictionless process, but rather demands considerable integrational work, creating new tasks that can be described as "digital housekeeping" (Aagaard 2022).

This paper explores how smart home devices — ranging from voice-activated assistants to robotic vacuum cleaners — reshape the dynamics of care work within households. By tracing the complex process of a home becoming "smart," the paper investigates how digital capitalism affects both the home and the care work done within it on a micro level. Feminist perspectives on care work are crucial to understanding these dynamics, as the distribution of digital housekeeping often falls along existing gendered lines.

Drawing on a multi-sited ethnographic approach, including an online ethnography on Reddit, qualitative interviews, and trade fair observations, this paper unpacks the everyday negotiations and frictions that arise when households integrate smart devices into their routines. The analysis highlights how users are not passive consumers of digital technologies but engage in active sense-making processes to adapt these devices to their specific needs and care practices. This granular perspective complicates dominant narratives of digital capitalism, which rarely take the domestic sphere as a starting point for a theorisation.

By bringing feminist theories of care work into dialogue with debates on platformisation, this paper contributes to a more situated understanding of digital capitalism. It argues that the platformisation of care work not only reconfigures the home as a site of value extraction but also reinforces pre-existing inequalities along lines of gender, class, and race.

Gig-work platforms in informal home elder care: Power dynamics in the private household as a workplace

Anna Korn, Ruhr-Universität Bochum

In Germany, the demand for informal elderly care in private households is increasing, while at the same time, there is a shortage of skilled workers. To address this gap in the ongoing care crisis, various commercial online brokerage platforms have emerged (Dowling 2022), including in the field of gig work. Digital platforms mediate hourly care services between private households and informal caregivers within the framework of gig work, creating new labor relationships (Vallas & Schor 2020). However, this particular form of platform labor brings specific challenges, particularly concerning power relations within private households and the responsibilities of the platforms.

This contribution focuses on the private household as a workplace and its implications for gig work in informal elderly care in Germany. Although the gig workers examined here – unlike in other labor arrangements – do not live in the household of the person they care for, meaning that it is not simultaneously their place of residence and work (Lutz & Benazha 2024), the workplace still significantly shapes the working reality of care workers, even if their activity only takes place there occasionally. While the household is a familiar space for those receiving care, it represents a precarious work environment for caregivers, fundamentally different from other workplaces (Lutz 2011). In Germany there is a strong legal protection of private space, so that grey areas arise when it becomes a place of work (Böning 2015), further challenges arise due to the specific

conditions of this workplace (Kreimer 2014). Unlike public or corporate workspaces, there is no social oversight by colleagues or supervisors. Those living in the household – usually the clients and/or their relatives – not only have interpretative authority over routines (Lutz 2011), work tasks, and conditions but also over the interpretation of conflicts or misunderstandings. This power asymmetry is further reinforced by spatial isolation and the invisibility of work behind closed doors (Hatton 2017): caregivers are often left to themselves and have no immediate support from colleagues, making them particularly vulnerable in conflict or crisis situations. Additionally, in many cases, there is a social inequality between care workers and their clients, reflected in unequal access to resources and power, which can be used in disputes. This increases the risk of unfair treatment, exploitative working conditions, or even harassment – without direct mechanisms provided by platforms, to address such issues.

This contribution is based on qualitative interviews with caregivers in informal elderly care in Germany, who are mediated through digital platforms. It examines how the specific work environment of private households affects labor relations and what strategies workers develop to cope with power imbalances. The role of the platforms is critically discussed: To what extent do they take responsibility for the working conditions organized through their digital infrastructure? What scope do platform workers have to defend themselves against problematic working conditions arising from the private household as a workplace?

11.00 – 12.30

SESSION 5: REPRESENTATION AND OBJECTIFICATION OF CARE WORK(ERS)

CHAIR: JANNE MARTHA LENTZ
ROOM: HEL 063

Care as a representational practice: Researching the (in)visibility of private care work in creator culture

Friederike Jage-D'Aprile, Shari Adlung Film University Babelsberg

Motherhood is increasingly influenced by the communication processes of digital media in today's everyday world (Beuckels & De Wolf, 2024). Likewise, feminist scholars call for private care work to be re-examined in academic theory and practice (Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Siemon & Reißmann, 2023). This project is complex, as care is interwoven into hegemonic power structures, intersectional inequalities and is gender-coded due to socio-cultural mechanisms (Federici, 2020; Hatton, 2017; Rich, 1976). Within a neoliberal gender regime, care-specific disparities are additionally de-thematized or become part of complexity-reducing narratives that privatize care activities (Dowling, 2021; Fraser, 2013; O'Brien Hallstein, 2011). The phenomenon of motherhood content creators (so-called 'momfluencers'), who publish their motherhood topics online, negotiate them with a community and, in most cases, monetize them, is therefore becoming more important for sociocultural issues within communication studies (Beuckels & De Wolf, 2024; Mary et al., 2024). In addition to the commodification of private care content (Krzyżanowska, 2020), an emancipatory potential of making (formerly) private motherhood

topics visible and thus politicizable is discussed in the literature too (Friedman, 2010; Lopez, 2009; Van Cleaf, 2015). Therefore, I'll propose a conceptualization of care theories as part of critically debating creator culture, in order to explore and reflect on new visual "socio-digital care arrangements" (Zakharova & Jarke, 2024, p. 660). We would like to illustrate this with an example from our current research on resistant aesthetic forms in the content of motherhood creators on Instagram. The literature shows that while creators often depict idealized forms of motherhood on social media, some posts disrupt these norms — for example, by visualizing moments of exhaustion. Based on collected accounts of German content creators who publish maternity-related content and have more than 10,000 followers (n=534), a theory-based selection of accounts was made that indicated a potential to visually and narrative challenge maternity ideologies. Three visual creator types were identified: the funny, the honest and the non-conventional. A visual and narrative analysis of the content reveals its solidarity potential, where ideals of motherhood are challenged on an aesthetic level. We aim to discuss how these creative forms can be understood as caring aesthetics (Saito, 2022), as they highlight injustices through the visual sharing of everyday experiences and examine the wider societal impact of platformisation on the gendered division of labour in everyday life.

The careworker as influencer, care professional, and entrepreneur? Navigating social media as infrastructures for assetization
Fenna Nijboer, Francisca Grommé, Erasmus University Rotterdam

In the context of labor market flexibilization and a persistent shortage of healthcare workers, digital and social media platforms are increasingly shaping the labor supply in the care sector. Traditional salaried roles are giving way to self-employment, facilitated by platform economies that mediate work opportunities and professional visibility. This shift is not merely logistical; it is fundamentally transforming the labor market by redefining how care work is performed, valued, and understood.

Within mainstream media and political discourse, self-employed care workers are often scrutinized for embracing an entrepreneurial identity that appears to conflict with the traditional "caring identity" associated with their profession (Duijs et al., 2023; Jakobsen et al., 2021). They are frequently characterized as "profit-driven" or "selfish," reflecting broader societal anxieties about the commercialization of essential services. However, these portrayals fail to capture the complexities of contemporary care work, particularly the ways in which digital platforms provide spaces for care workers to negotiate their professional legitimacy, visibility, and autonomy.

Social media platforms such as TikTok and LinkedIn have become key arenas where care workers engage in self-branding, positioning themselves as both professionals and entrepreneurs. Through these platforms, they navigate tensions between traditional care ethics and the market-driven imperatives of digital labor, curating professional identities that both reflect and contest dominant narratives. In doing so, they not only highlight their skills and expertise but also leverage their personalities as economic assets. Their online presence becomes a form of digital assetization—a process in which personal experiences and professional identities are transformed into capitalizable value (Nappert & Plante, 2023; Rosamond, 2023). This

phenomenon is deeply intertwined with broader trends such as the privatization of healthcare and the rise of technology-driven labor cultures, reinforcing new economic models in which visibility, engagement, and self-promotion become integral to professional survival.

This study investigates how social media platforms function as infrastructures for assetization and examines how care workers navigate and (can) partake in this process. By adopting an ethnographic approach, it explores how self-employed healthcare professionals engage with digital platforms—particularly TikTok and LinkedIn—to construct their professional legitimacy, secure work opportunities, and negotiate their status within a rapidly evolving labor market. The research critically interrogates the assetization of care work through, on, and for digital platforms, considering both its potential as a tool for empowerment and its role in deepening precarity by reinforcing investor-driven logics.

By framing care work as an assetized profession, this study raises important questions about how digital labor structures influence the valuation, perception, and institutionalization of care in the platform economy. As care workers navigate the demands of self-promotion and economic survival, their professional identities are increasingly shaped by socio-technical infrastructures that blur the boundaries between caregiving, entrepreneurship, and digital labor. This paper contributes to contemporary discussions on the intersection of care work, digital economies, and the assetization of care.

Swipe right: Objectification and sexualization on domestic work platforms
Laura Wiesböck, Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna

In contemporary capitalist societies, domestic work is increasingly externalised and marketized, allowing profit-oriented gig-economy platforms to emerge as new actors in this field. Considering that such digital marketplaces shape the interactions and relationships between clients and workers, it is crucial to examine experiences of household workers in relation to the norms, beliefs and ideas embedded in the functionalities and design of the platform. This is particularly relevant concerning the historically prevalent (sexual) objectification of domestic cleaners. Therefore, the present paper presents 15 problem-centred interviews with female domestic cleaners working in the gig-economy in Vienna. The results are complemented by applying the walkthrough method and discursive interface analysis on the website of Betreut.at, one of Austria's largest platforms for domestic services. Our study shows that the interviewees' experiences reflect the culturally embedded objectification of domestic workers. Recurrent themes identified include clients' practices related to lookism and the prioritization of attractiveness, unwanted dating requests, and sexual harassment, all of which are, to some degree, shaped by the platform's technological design. Additionally, the platform's website interface lacks essential safety features, exacerbating the vulnerability of household cleaners, who are at high risk of sexual abuse.

Informal workspaces in public space: Layers of female invisibility in delivery work
Emilia Bruck, TU Wien

App-based food delivery workers represent a recent phenomenon in European cities and beyond, exemplifying, in the tradition of feminist geographers, the social and spatial outsourcing of care work. However, they also build upon the legacy of bike messengers, delivery motorists, and food vendors, who have long been integral to the urban labour force – both formal and informal – in cities across the global North and South. In this historical context, the rise of app-based delivery couriers signals a renaissance of the bicycle as a working tool in European cities. This revival stands at the intersection of multiple long-term shifts in urban development, revealing transformational conflicts: the rising emphasis on sustainable urban logistics by municipalities challenged to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate induced traffic by digital consumer habits; the remaking and growing demand for public spaces in the wake of new mobility options, climate adaptation measures, and a global pandemic; and the expansion of platform urbanism restructuring service models, labour conditions, social relations, and spatial configurations.

This piece is grounded in empirical research in North America and provides a theoretical framework for a comparative study with European cities. It argues that the platformization of delivery work not only promotes the informalization of labour but also invokes informal workspaces that spill into the public realm and fuel contemporary struggles over public space, particularly marginalizing female workers. Platform companies enforce on-demand labour practices devoid of guarantees, stability, and workplace safety. For bike delivery couriers, this translates into a lack of formal workspaces, such as sheltered waiting areas for breaks between orders and restroom access, overnight storage facilities, and designated spots for recharging electric bikes and smartphones. This infrastructural neglect is a deliberate strategy by platform companies to reinforce their claim of a contractual, temporary workforce, while devolving responsibility for workplace safety onto cities. In the absence of adequate alternatives, bike delivery couriers are left to linger on sidewalks, in parks, near community centres, and at subway or train stations.

However, simply interpreting these informal practices as creative appropriation of space and acts of collective agency fails to recognize underlying intersectional vulnerabilities and gendered inequalities. In many cities, the presence of app-based delivery couriers has sparked contemporary conflicts over the right to the city and competing demands for public space. Faced with the paradox of 'visible invisibility', app-based delivery couriers are exposed in public but neither recognized as part of the cycling population nor valued as the essential workforce they increasingly represent, even beyond times of crisis. Moreover, a lack of formal workspaces amplifies the invisibility of female couriers as many limit their public exposure for self-protection and develop alternative strategies to compensate for infrastructural neglect. To explore the emergence of informal workspaces and the struggle over public space, this contribution

combines notions of spatial appropriation with a multidimensional understanding of public space and a feminist reading of intersectional inequalities.

Spatialising emotional labour: Cleaners' experiences on digital platforms in Berlin
Sarinah, Humboldt University Berlin, *Kartika Manurung,* University of Bonn

This paper explores a critical comparative analysis of how disparate platform models configure emotional labour and spatial practices among cleaners in Berlin. Focusing on Helpling, a gig-based application characterised by stringent algorithmic oversight, and contrasting it with Betreut and Putzperle, membership-based websites that function largely as intermediaries, this study illustrates how the intensities of emotional labour and surveillance vary across platform regimes. Whereas Helpling compels workers to secure consistently high ratings under algorithmic management, Betreut and Putzperle permit a more flexible, if potentially more precarious, arrangement that largely unfolds beyond direct platform control.

Grounded in Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labour, feminist labour geography, and materialist social reproduction theory, the research examines how digitalisation, migration status, and gendered hierarchies intersect to produce particular forms of precarious work, especially for migrant women in Berlin. Through qualitative interviews with platform-based cleaners, autoethnographic positionality reflections by the researchers (who are themselves migrant student workers), and spatial analyses of work locations, mobility, and urban neighbourhood dynamics, the study illuminates how domestic labour is reconfigured through both app-mediated and informally negotiated practices. It aims to transcend predominant scholarly emphases on algorithmic labour control by exposing the emotional and relational intensities that attend paid domestic work in precarious, racialised, and gendered contexts.

The findings highlight how platform logics extend beyond purely economic transactions to reshape everyday geographies of social reproduction, revealing a persistent undervaluation of care work and the corporeal, relational dimensions it entails. By foregrounding the lived experiences of migrant cleaners, including the writer themselves, under contrasting platform models, this paper contributes to emerging debates on the digital geographies of care. Additionally, as the authors are trade unionists, the paper examines the extent to which labour organisations engage with gig-based social reproduction in Berlin. It thus calls for a more robust theoretical and policy-oriented engagement with the ways algorithmic governance, intersectional class power relations, urban spatialities, and trade union intervention coalesce to affect the livelihoods and well-being of platform-based care workers.

(En)coding care into digital urbanism: Vignettes of collective practices
Niloufar Vadiati, Leuphana University Lüneburg, *Letizia Chiappini,* University of Twente *and Martin Bangratz,* RWTH University

The tech-entrepreneurial model behind the computation of urban processes is (re)producing what has already been identified as a technocratic, solutionist, and commodifying model of

urban planning. Within this model, not only is caring not a prerequisite of urban production, but decade(s)in of smartification and platformization practices shows diminishing the spaces, infrastructure, and socio-economic relations that were co-produced to generate care.

Aligning with Special Issue's conceptual framework of Digital Geography and Society Journal as 'from (de)coding the machine to (en)coding care, this paper examines the responses toward the machinery of exploitation, commodification, and dispossession, of tech-capitalist smartification and platformization through care-based theorization. The focus is on new forms and networks of praxis that encoded care as a politic, a practice, and an epistemology of everyday life.

Through the lens of feminist geography, care is examined as a multidimensional concept encompassing socio-spatial dynamics, power relations, and ethical urban practices. Using empirical data that are collected across central European cities and by three research projects, the study showcases alternative digital urbanism practices, categorized into three vignettes: refusal, commoning, and reappropriation. These categories are illustrated with cases such as grassroots food cooperatives, feminist hackspaces, digital sovereignty initiatives, platform-based welfare experiments and civil society initiatives such as Code for Germany.

By situating care within the spatial and social fabric of urban life, this paper argues for its potential as a politic, practice, and epistemology that challenges the exploitative logic of contemporary digital infrastructures. Encoding care in this paper has been shown to be deliberate embedding of relational, contextual, and collective practices of care into digital infrastructures and urban spaces. The findings also reveal that such embeddedness of care practices within local contexts is in dual need for trans-local networks and territorial embeddedness. This study contributes to the discourse on caring digital urbanism, advancing a feminist theorisation of everyday digital urbanism.

16.00 – 17.30

SESSION 7: PLATFORM LABOUR AS AN ANSWER TO WHAT? REGULATORY SHORTCOMINGS AND PROCESSES OF PRECARISATION

CHAIR: EMMA DOWLING
ROOM: HEL 063

The irruption of digital care platforms: a homogeneous phenomenon?
Isabel María Barrero Velázquez, University of Cádiz

The aim of this communication is to get further knowledge about a tipology of platforms that has been barely studied: digital care platforms. In order to do so, we present some aspects that influence the working conditions of the workers.

Assuming the fact that there are different business models in care platforms, Perez de Guzman and Barrero (2023) suggest that this aspect, along with the level of specialization, are two

important axes for analyzing care platforms. By applying these axes, we concluded that not all of them offer the same working conditions.

Besides this first connection between business models and level of specialization, researchers such as Hall and Soskice (2001) argue that there is an important connection between business models and institutional contexts and regulatory frameworks. There are not enough studies about care platforms in Spain and even if the results are similar to those already known from other countries, their peculiarities must be taken into account.

The first of them is the institutional context, which is framed in the Mediterranean welfare State (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Among its characteristics are the high level of support in the family (Del Pino and Rubio, 2016), market fragmentation (Prieto, 2023) and late industrialization (Del Pino and Rubio, 2016). The ageing of the population is considerably important in this country, which is not accompanied by an adequate public service coverage, opening the door to a new niche for platform work: the field of domestic and care service (Rodriguez-Modroño et al., 2024).

Regarding the regulatory frameworks, it is important to highlight that in Spain it is not until 2022 that the right to unemployment benefit for domestic workers was regulated. Although they should be registered in the special regime for domestic workers, the platforms do not contribute to this being effective. The informality in which it can trigger is also reproduced in other countries, either because they do not contemplate a regulation of these workers, or because it is insufficient, besides the lack of involvement of the platforms again.

There are numerous factors that promote inequality in this sector, such as gender (the amount of women is considerably higher in this kind of platforms), the origin and administrative situation of the person (Lozano, 2021), the presence of family responsabilities and salary dependence on the platforms (De las Heras and Lanzadera, 2023).

"It's a way to make life work" – Platform work as a coping strategy for healthcare professionals under healthcare restructuring
Peter van Eerbeek, Karlstad University, *Desirée Enlund*, Linköping University

Feminist scholars have provided important insights into the platformization of social reproductive labor. However, how this process plays out in settings of institutionalized social reproductive labor, such as public healthcare systems, has received less attention. This paper seeks to address this gap by focusing on healthcare professionals working for private for-profit healthcare platform companies (HPCs) operating in the Swedish public healthcare system. In public healthcare, the care crisis manifests as austerity politics and restructuring, through which public healthcare is expected to not only meet the needs of social reproduction, but also the demands of capitalist production. The heightened importance of private for-profit providers illustrates this. Healthcare professionals experience this crisis of care through deteriorating working conditions, linked to high levels of stress and burnout, leading many healthcare professionals to contemplate changing employers or leaving the sector altogether. In contrast to the large pools of marginalized workers typical of other platform work, the healthcare sector faces increasing consumer/patient demand and labor shortages. This affects the sector's

capacity to provide for the population's social reproductive needs, but also enhances opportunities for healthcare professionals' labor market mobility.

At the intersection of these interrelated forces HPCs have inserted themselves into the Swedish public healthcare system. Since 2016, HPCs have become increasingly significant private for-profit actors in the Swedish public primary care. HPCs have scaled rapidly by providing app-based consultations via video and/or chat with healthcare professionals. This initially all-digital healthcare provision has been followed by expansion to in-place provision, adding new services such as mental health, and setting up operations in other European countries, following a platform logic aimed at achieving a monopoly position in a particular market.

For healthcare professionals, working for HPCs presents an alternative to traditional public sector employment, working for private providers or temporary staffing agencies; and constitutes a way to enable their own and household's social reproduction. However, the motivations for healthcare professionals to engage with this type of platform work remain in the shadows. In this paper, we present an analysis of the reasons why and how healthcare professionals engage with platform work, and how this might be seen as a way of adopting diverse strategies of individual and collective coping and resistance. What strategies may be within reach of healthcare professionals vary with their unequal positions in the healthcare's spatial divisions of labor, constituted by intersecting differences related to, amongst others, professions, gender, and race. Therefore we inquire into how intersectional inequalities shape individual and collective working realities of platform work performed by healthcare professionals, based on interviews with medical doctors, nurses, and psychologists providing the services on which HPCs depend.

Selfish and irresponsible? Everyday care ethics of self-employed nurses
Justien Dingelstadt, Francisca Grommé, Erasmus University Rotterdam

This study focuses on self-employed nurses working through digital labour platforms. Disillusioned by high work pressure, low salaries and limited flexibility, many nurses are attracted to independent work with higher pay (Duijs, 2023). Self-employment is facilitated by commercial intermediaries, offering digital platforms and apps to match shifts and facilitate finances and administration (Dingelstad et al., 2025). This work arrangement increases healthcare costs, largely due to high matching fees, and puts pressure on continuity of care (Lien, 2023). Historically, nurses are expected to keep the healthcare system running uncomplainingly, usually justified by gendered stereotypes of caring as an altruistic vocation (Banks, 2018). Likewise, politicians, policymakers and healthcare organisations now dismiss self-employment as selfish, irresponsible or even 'unethical', stating that nurses should take responsibility and return to direct employment (Wallenburg et al., 2023). However, such responses fit neoliberal politics of rather 'fixing' nurse attitudes than addressing the structural problems of poor working conditions in care organisations (Dowling, 2021).

This study builds on feminist literature on care ethics (Puig de La Bellacasa, 2017), specifically 'everyday ethics'; striving for 'good' care in everyday situations (Pols, 2023). Drawing on 21 interviews with self-employed nurses we show how they redefine or maintain their professional nursing identity and related ethics through everyday activities like scheduling shifts, rate setting

and administrative work. However, in the process, resolving one form of precarity often leads to the creation of another. Some nurses felt that self-employment is the only way to have sufficient time to provide good care as they can spend less time on administration and organisational maintenance work (e.g. team meetings). However, such duties are then passed on to nurses who remain in direct employment, increasing their work pressure (Lien, 2023). For others, self-employment is the only way to keep practicing nursing, for example because in direct employment they cannot make ends meet (Duijs, 2023) or carry out informal care duties. However, they struggle with the uncertainty of individualised social and economic risk (Pulignano et al., 2023). To counter narratives of nurses' self-employment as 'unethical', we show how nurses reformulate nursing professionalism and related ethics on a daily basis, against the backdrop of structural precarity surrounding formal and informal care work (Dowling, 2021).

SESSION 8: ON THE VARIETIES OF EMOTIONAL LABOUR IN DIGITALLY- MEDIATED CARE WORK

CHAIR: MÊ-LINH RIEMANN
ROOM: HEL 065

A qualitative study of Norwegian freelancers' self- perceptions and emotional experiences
Lin Proitz, Østfold University College

In Norway, freelancers can apply for financial work assessment allowances and institutional support from the government. Yet still, the number of people engaged in 'non-standard work' remains relatively low. Drawing on feminist theories of emotion and affect, this article explores how the digitalisation of society imapcts freelancers' narratives about their work, as well as how they understand themselves in these affective discursive spaces. The study is based on ten qualitative interviews with Norwegian freelancers operating in sectors where digital platforms facilitate both temporal and spatial flexibility.

The findings illuminate that participants are deeply emotionally invested in their work and experience a strong sense of freedom. However, this perceived autonomy—marked by the ability to work at any time and from anywhere—simultaneously fosters unrealistic expectations to work *all the time and everywhere*. This results in a workload under huge pressure in an often idealised world of freelancing where issues of vulnerability and insecurity are seldom talked about.

Reshaping domestic labour? Intersectional perspectives on platform work in Switzerland
Hélène Widmann, University of Lausanne

The emergence of digital platforms offering household cleaning services in the cities of Geneva and Lausanne in Switzerland is reshaping the sector, impacting workers' employment patterns and daily work experiences. This study examines these transformations through a broader analysis of the cleaning sector, the rise of digital intermediaries, and changes in labor relations. It is based on exploratory interviews with cleaning workers, platform managers, clients, trade union representatives, and public sector institutions, alongside secondary analysis of data from the Enquête Suisse sur la population active (ESPA).

This paper starts with an overview of the Swiss cleaning sector. It distinguishes between the informal "domestic economy", often characterized by undeclared work in private households, and the more regulated "cleaning" sector, structured by collective labor agreements (CCTs) and dominated by large private firms. Both sectors employ predominantly female and immigrant workers (Benelli, 2011), who often experience downward mobility due to the lack of recognition of their foreign qualifications. Their employment status is shaped by their migrant status and language proficiency: undocumented workers tend to engage in domestic work and those with legal residency are more likely to be employed by cleaning firms or via the "chèque-emploi" system*. Some workers hold down multiple jobs, embracing both sectors. Understanding these inequalities through an intersectional perspective is key to analyzing the rise of digital platforms.

We then explore the rise of digital cleaning service platforms with a focus on the market leader in Switzerland for two reasons:

1. The platform operates across sectors, bridging the "domestic economy" and the "cleaning" sector. It seeks to "industrialize" the domestic economy, introducing capitalist principles to a sector historically characterized by informal labor (Devetter & Rousseau, 2007). This raises questions about the role of platforms in mediating employer-worker relationships and the effects of this intermediation on labor relations.

2. Since 2021, it employs workers on the platform. Initially modeled on Uber, the platform now claims to be committed to combatting undeclared work (Mittmasser et al., 2024) through "rescue narratives" (Farris, 2017).

Such claims deserve empirical scrutiny: does a formal employment contract lead to better working conditions?

Our discussion focusses on the role of digital cleaning service platforms in reshaping working conditions in a sector historically characterized by informal work. Labor relations become triangular, involving the platform, clients, and workers, with control shifting from direct control or "close domination" (Memmi, 2003), to client-driven evaluations. Unlike the fully algorithmic management Uber model (Rosenblat, 2019), this platform still relies on human managers.

From a feminist perspective, we question how platform capitalism integrates undervalued sectors into profit-driven structures, reproducing class, gender, and migration-based inequalities. We argue that platforms can render domestic labor invisible and serve as a buffer against client misconduct, offering some protection against discrimination. However, even when platforms are used, wages remain low, career progression is limited, and underemployment persists, forcing workers to supplement their income with additional jobs.

*"Chèque-emploi" is a simplified administrative service in the French-speaking part of Switzerland that allows private households to legally employ domestic workers.

Just keep on smiling! Emotional labour digitally exposed in platform-mediated domestic cleaning

Katarzyna Gruszka, Malmö University, Anna Pillinger, Johannes Kepler University Linz

Leaving your bad mood outside, not bringing it into your client's home. Being nice, polite, friendly. Adding a little bit of small talk here, and little bit of small talk there. Keep on smiling and make sure to keep your rating high. These practices are common to home cleaners who provide their services via digital labor platforms. Behind closed doors of private home spaces, the very "hands-on", physical work of cleaning is entangled with the less visible, interactive and emotional interrelations, be it "offline" or with digital platform mediation.

Importantly, the platformization of domestic cleaning renders such emotionally laden dynamics more visible, opening possibilities for a more nuanced unpacking and a more comprehensive understanding thereof. In this paper, we ask: How do digital platforms expose and shape emotional labor in the field of domestic cleaning? We draw on a case study of a major cleaning platform in Germany and qualitative data from the three actors in this particular service triangle: the platform, the cleaners as service providers, and the clients as service receivers. This includes: i) a detailed study of the platform environment with the use of the walk-through method, analyzing e.g., the content of its website, the review and rating systems, terms and conditions, search filters, cleaner profiles, client reviews, and the blog; ii) semi-structured interviews with cleaners; iii) semi-structured interviews with clients. Our findings show both the exposure and the shaping of emotional and affective interactions on platform infrastructures, exemplified by quantifying cleaners' friendliness as part of their five-star rating. Complementing the analysis of the platform's infrastructure with interview insights on cleaner-client interactions brings us to a peculiar paradox: while emotional and affective elements are "planted", or inscribed, in the digital infrastructure by the platform, the very same elements unfolding in cleaner-client interactions undermine the accuracy and reliability of key platform governance mechanisms, such as client-outsourced platform rating.

9.00 – 10.30

SESSION 9: BETWEEN ISOLATION AND BELONGING: BRINGING IN MIGRANTS' PERSPECTIVES ON PLATFORM LABOUR AND SERVICES

CHAIR: KARIN SCHWITER
ROOM: HEL 160

"I don't want to underpay people": Migrant mothers in the Netherlands using online childcare platforms in navigating politics of belonging and care

Colleen Boland, Radboud University

Feminist scholarship engages with motherhood, childcare and the boundaries between private and public domains. Belonging and motherhood are in flux and situational, and even more so in combined digital and physical space, facing structural, cultural and material constraints. As part of this investigation into the dynamics of childcare, decades of knowledge production have been dedicated to the domestic work sector and feminized global care chains, arguing such work is societally undervalued and can generate dependent and vulnerable positionality. Against this backdrop, more recently, digital platforms or social networks connect domestic workers to migrant (and non-migrant) employers, with new or reconstituted implications for gender inequalities, and the intersection of structural, cultural, and material inclusions and exclusions. While much research has focused on the experiences of domestic workers, there is a noticeable gap regarding the employer perspective—especially that of migrant mothers. This article inquires as to why migrant mothers turn to digital platforms in addressing childcare needs, whether they are aware of the regulation applicable to contracting paid childcare, and if (and how) platforms obfuscate understandings as to employer responsibilities and domestic work regulation. It employs a combined social reproduction and migrant labor regime approach (Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2024), as well as frames the discussion in terms of the concept of belonging (drawing on the work of Yuval-Davis), which remains inextricably linked to normative values of care. The paper first offers background as to childcare regimes in the Dutch context. The empirical analysis includes a desk review of online childcare platforms, alongside a survey among 30 participants and 9 semi-structured follow up interviews with migrant mothers in the Netherlands. On the one hand, findings indicated little or unclear knowledge of domestic work regulation, further obfuscated by platforms as an intermediary. On the other, negotiations of belonging in fluctuating contexts, as well as perceptions of exclusion and high costs of care, served as the rationale behind turning to childcare platforms. The study represents a springboard for future research across welfare states into the definition of employer and the perspective of the same with the advent of platformization in the childcare sector.

Migrant live-in care workers and the introductory model in England: From agencies to platforms

Nicky Sharma, University of Sussex

Live-in care is an important and growing segment of England's social care sector, involving care workers who live and work in their clients' homes for extended periods of time. This type of care is increasingly facilitated through care platforms that operate under an "introductory" model. In this arrangement, care becomes an individual transaction between self-employed care workers and their clients, isolated in private homes and placed beyond the regulatory oversight of England's health and social care regulator. Care platforms therefore represent an evolution of the established introductory care agencies through which many live-in care workers find work. Drawing on ongoing PhD research with migrant live-in care workers, this paper examines the experiences of migrant care workers who find work through introductory agencies and care platforms.

Using McDonald's concept of "individualised risk", (McDonald, 2021) the paper explores how platforms' and introductory agencies' emphasis on flexibility and reduced costs for clients contribute to precarious work conditions, heightened risks of exploitation, and the devaluation of care labour. This focus underscores how migrant care workers face intersecting vulnerabilities, including their isolation in the home-workplace, which shapes their ability to navigate and negotiate decent working conditions. At the same time, migrant live-in care workers can enact agency within these constraints. In the absence of trade union support or regulatory oversight they adopt individual strategies and practices to define their role and set boundaries, negotiate terms, and secure better placements for themselves.

At the hub: Unlikely encounters, new 'we-groups' and processes of division among food delivery riders in Hamburg

Mê-Linh Riemann, Europa-Universität Flensburg

The working conditions of food delivery riders have received significant scholarly attention in recent years (Mendonça & Kougiannou, 2025). Researchers from various disciplinary backgrounds have focused on a variety of issues, including: the experience of algorithmic control (Heiland, 2025), the risk of accidents (Useche et al. 2024), the role of migrant labour (Altenried, 2024; Leung, 2022), precarious contracts (Pulignano & Grimshaw, 2025), flexibility and work fragmentation (Bonifacio & Peterlongo, 2024). The working routines are hereby mostly portrayed as an *isolated* endeavour, as riders spent large parts of their days alone, e.g., in traffic.

Some literature points to the emergence of *solidarity* networks among riders, particularly in the context of activism and collective struggles (Orth, 2022; Mara et al. 2023; Tassinari & Macarrone, 2020). The findings allude to a *communal* dimension of food delivery work, which has so far been understudied. While many studies primarily focus on riders' experiences 'on the road', this paper reconstructs the emergence and dissolution of 'we-groups' at hubs and warehouses. Depending on the business model (i.e. grocery or meal delivery), the latter play a central role in workers' everyday routines and are commonly described as uniquely international spaces. The data revealed that interpersonal connections, which were mainly formed in a warehouse setting, had

a profound impact on how interviewees experienced and evaluated their rider occupation in retrospect.

On the basis of 22 autobiographical narrative interviews with (former) food delivery workers in Hamburg, the author identifies several (dis)integration processes that can be retraced to (a) spontaneous intercultural encounters ('from below') and (b) specific business strategies and policies ('from above'). The biographical format of the interview allowed participants to reflect about how their relationship with the platforms changed *over time* (Riemann et al. 2023). The data revealed a common pattern of experiencing initial euphoria to gradual disillusionment about the working conditions and hub community: a process that was often tied to the respective platforms' rise and downfall.

By adopting a longitudinal perspective on the experience of food delivery labour, it becomes possible to reconstruct workers' *ambiguous* relationship to the platforms. Many interviewees were keenly aware of exploitative structures (e.g., low pay, risks of accidents etc.), but also expressed appreciation for the friendships and connections they got to build 'on the ground'.

11.00 – 12.30

SESSION 10: WHO CARES? ADDRESSING INTERSECTIONAL INEQUALITIES AND THE PROMISE OF AUTOMATISATION

CHAIR: ANKE STRÜVER
ROOM: HEL 160

The class structure of care platform labour: Stratification among digitally mediated care workers

Franziska Baum, University of Hamburg

While care work is dominantly done by women, research on platforms remains to show mainly male perspective on gig work. Research has struggled with identifying and talking to female workers who actually take over care gigs and are digitally mediated on platforms. Gig work may present a disruption of working conditions for (non-migrantized, middle-class) men, however precarious working conditions have been the reality for care workers all along, whether gigified or not (Glaser 2021). Nevertheless, scholarly feminist perspectives on gig work assert that conditions of work and care are worsened by platforms (Dowling 2021). Yet, female (care workers) perspectives on how gig work reshapes their working conditions remain scarce. Very little empirical evidence of actual care workers experiences is available in general (Kampouri 2022), but even less for highly relational care workers (Orth/Baum 2024; Molitor 2024). Recently, studies have shown, that the fragmentation of care work may be also mirrored in the different care niches platform companies inhibit (Rodriguez-Modroño 2024, Baum 2024, Hopwood et al. 2024). Studies show that due to specific skill sets and characteristics, such as visas and

education (Orth 2024, Rodriguez-Modroño 2024), as well as qualification and motivation (Baum, 2024) workers stratify across different types of care platforms. Migrant workers are typically those workers who offer cleaning and child care, while more settled workers may offer senior and nursing care via platforms. Based on my own empirical research on elder care platforms, I aim to show that also in the field of senior (support) care work, there is a substantial stratification of labor.

In my contribution, I will follow the question what class has to do with the different routes care workers take into selling their labor digitally mediated. Analyzing data from a German care platform exhibits many employed and trained care workers offer their labor via on-demand platforms, while other workers, especially middle-class career changing women, set up their own websites and may only use low-barrier market-place platforms as an additional entrance to the market. Combining a cluster analysis of 2000+ care workers profiles from the researched on-demand care platform and interviews of self-employed care (support) workers who report on their choices for certain means of mediation, I aim to show how class and capital composition shapes the routes care workers take to enter the field of digitally mediated care.

Exploring the spatial relationality of intersectional inequalities: The experiences of care workers using digital labour platforms
Christiane Meyer-Habighorst, University of Zurich

In recent years, feminist scholars have highlighted how digital (care) labour platforms reinforce intersecting inequalities, particularly along the axes of gender, race, and migration status (e.g., Fetterolf 2022; Rodríguez-Modroño et al., 2022; Ticona & Mateescu 2018; Webster & Zhang 2022; van Doorn 2027). While these contributions are vital, they predominantly focus on analysing more technical and algorithmic features of the digital platforms, such as workers' profiles, invasive control mechanisms like rating systems, and the visibility of workers through their profiles. What remains less explored in the current discourse on digital labour platforms, however, is the emotional experience and perception of the platform space by workers.

To better understand how intersectional inequalities shape, reinforce, and manifest themselves for care workers using digital labour platforms to seek jobs—and how these inequalities are emotionally experienced—I employed the method of Relief Maps (Rodó-Zárate 2022) in combination with qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Relief Maps are a (digital) tool designed to capture, analyse, and display the spatial and emotional dimensions of "social inequalities from an intersectional perspective" (Reliefmaps 2025).

Building on an intersectional analysis, I argue that workers' experiences of intersectional inequalities in the digital platform space are highly relational to other spaces, places, and lived experiences. This relationality becomes evident in two ways. First, many workers perceive the digital platform as a neutral space. Second, certain categories of difference become more salient for workers, while others are obscured in the digital space, thereby shaping the intersectional experience of the platform.

By applying an intersectional geographical conceptual and methodological approach, I aim to better understand platform work from a feminist perspective—both by engaging with the still often-invisible sector of care work and by applying an intersectional framework to data collection and analysis. This approach allows to shed light on the often-hidden emotions of comfort and discomfort experienced by workers in relation to the digital platform space. Through this lens, I aim to contribute not only to the current scholarly discourse on digital (care) labour platforms but also to a broader understanding of the geographies of intersecting categories of oppression and privilege. In line with other researchers, I emphasise the importance of spatial relationality when examining intersectional inequalities (Rodó-Zárate 2024; Valentine 2007) and how feelings of comfort and discomfort serve as crucial indicators of the geographies of intersectionality (Ahmed 2007; Rodó-Zárate 2024).

Care as data labour: The platformisation of ageing in place
Mathias Denecke, University of Bochum

The talk focuses on the German welfare state's ambitions to cope with an ageing society. The considered fixes, I argue, are propelled by a platform logic. The stage is a model home for ageing persons exhibited in Kaiserslautern. Equipped with sensors and assistive technologies, the smart home promises to age autonomously, safely, and comfortably in one's own home as long as possible (Marquardt 2018; Peine/Neven 2021). In this vision, promoted as being a »future just around the corner« (Bell/Dourish 2011, 134; Jarke/Manchester 2025), care work is platformised and remodelled as data labour.

Firstly, the assistive home itself is a platform which is supposed to take over daily care tasks and relieve relatives and care workers from the ›burden‹ of care work (Schwennesen 2019; cf. Bunting 2020). The smart home, however, alters the labour of residents to sustain themselves (cf. Mager/Mayer 2019; Wiedemann 2019). The sensor environment captures inhabitants' movements and equates activity with well-being, obliging residents to conform to daily routines and be active. Secondly, sensor technologies which monitor persons shall alarm relatives and care workers only when needed and just-in-time (cf. Dowling 2022, 120), freeing up labour resources. But the assistive environment demands unpaid labour to keep the infrastructure operational (Moser/Thygesen 2015; cf. Schabacher 2021). Data must be interpreted and relayed, devices must be recharged and updated, and someone has to explain how devices are used (Dalmer et al. 2022, 87). Thirdly, particularly in urban areas care work is already increasingly reorganised as gig-work (Baum/Kufner 2021; Glaser 2021; Ticona/Mateescu 2018). Here, »global care chains« provide a continuous movement of care workers from the so-called Global South to keep the welfare states in the Global North running (Dowling 2022, 14; Fraser 2022, 70). They are supposed to fill in the shortcomings of assistive smart homes.

Following the fantasy to automatize care work, ageing at home promises to spare resources. By taking care of themselves with the assistance of smart technologies, residents shall not occupy the sparse time of care staff and a room in a care home. This technical fix is supposed to mitigate – but in fact displaces – the care crisis, as assistive technologies depend on unpaid and underpaid care work. Since most of the work is reportedly done by women, this fix reiterates the gendered division of care labour. At the same time, the production of assistive technologies and

the outsourcing of social reproductive work to underpaid workers fuels the national economy (Endter 2015; cf. Huws 2019; Winker 2015).