

UBER: deregulation and silent privatization

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Sub-theme: Structural Changes and Impacts on Labour

The Uber phenomenon is shaking the world in a variety of ways. One could say that the only perspective of criticism around the vertiginous spread of Uber across the globe is just a question of labor protectionism. Another could argue that Uber facilitates access to cheaper individual transportation when compared to traditional taxis, for instance. It is imperative to acknowledge that the Uber model is more than a technological application. Thus, we can examine Uber also in terms of labor relations, trade model, local governance and political aspects, and business model. The fact is that there are multiple ways to face this transformation, which give us the opportunity to look to this phenomenon by a multilayered perspective.

Scholars and activists have been trying to name the Uber phenomena and its ramifications. The model can be seen as gigeconomy or ubereconomy the instant or short time characteristic of the contract (when it exists) or employment relation. For instance, last a few minutes, as long as a taxi ride, or a few hours when you hire a draftsman to draw your caricature. The “short term” and per activities characteristic of this are not something new. With we talk with our grandparents or their parents, we will listen some similar descriptions such as latino underdocumented gardeners workers in US communities or groundskeepers in Brazil receiving wage per hour.

Considering that “old forms” employment and business dynamics can be easy identified in the ubereconomy, so what makes it different? The ubereconomy phenomena is not merely a new “technological revolution”, therefore, rather than understand the ubereconomy as a simple technology discussion, we need to consider the regulatory, economic and social aspect. Additionally we may consider that the ubereconomy is still an unexplored area, nevertheless, it is remarkable the amount of researchers that have been exploring the impacts of the ubereconomy in your societies.

In face of this complex scenario, a questions is fundamental to guide the development of this research is the dis-regulation of the taxi industry a silent privatization, and how will affect local governments?

My preliminary argument is that the dis-regulation of the taxi industry is a “silent” form of privatization, and will affect local governments by: Reducing their capacity of control on tax revenues; Design & plan of the fleet; Reduce capacity of bargain of taxi drivers and civil society by transferring power to a single MNC that could lid to a corporate capture of structures of collective power and civil society empowerment (such as city councils, sectorial councils, etc.). Thus, in doing so chances and unbalancing power dynamics already established in local governments and municipalities.

In the second section of this paper I will revisit the concept of ubereconomy by the labor perspective and discuss how this phenomenon can affect labor relations. Additionally we will discuss the effects over collective bargain and taxi drivers. In the third section section of this paper I aim to discuss how the ubereconomy can affect power dynamics in municipalities or local governments by exemplifying. In the fourth section of this paper my goal is to discuss the deregulation of taxi and individual transportation laws. Thus featuring new layer between the between the local government, taxi workers and civil society, by adding Uber (or others similar services) in the regulatory system.