Are platforms changing professionalism?

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Abstract

The main objective of this chapter is to analyse how the digital revolution intertwines with the processes that are transforming professionalism. In particular, we focus on the relationship between professional work and the transition to a new socio-technical system that has been defined as the *platform paradigm* or *platform economy*. We focus on the 'within' dimension of the transformation of professionalism. From the data collected, despite the platform work debate often being centred on low-skilled manual workers such as food delivery workers or couriers, it is clear that the professional services market represents a significant share of platform work. Our findings confirm the hypothesis that platform work, rather than being itself the driver of the processes that are transforming professions, is a mechanism that reinforces dynamics that are already in place in the expert labour segment, and that this leads to the emergence of what may be termed 'platform professionalism' as a variant of organisational professionalism.

Keywords

digitalisation, platform capitalism, regulated professions

Introduction

The main objective of this chapter is to analyse how the digital revolution – as "a general acceleration in the pace of technological change in the economy, driven by a massive expansion of our capacity to store, process and communicate information using electronic devices" (Eurofound 2018, p. iv) – intertwines with the processes that are transforming professionalism. In particular, we focus on the relationship between professional work and the transition to a new socio-technical system that has been defined as the *platform paradigm* or *platform economy* (MIT 2018).

In doing so, our hypothesis refers to a potential shift from organisational professionalism (Evetts 2006) to 'platform professionalism'. Of the three processes of transformation examined in this volume –the post-industrial transition, globalisation, and digitalisation– we focus on the last, with particular attention to the 'within' dimension: the role of digital platforms in strengthening the commercialisation of professionalism (Hanlon 1996, 1998), as well as the related processes of marginalisation of professions (Butler et al. 2012) (see CH1). We ask if the diffusion of technologies is causing fragmentation of labour and loss of professional power, or is instead a mechanism that is reinforcing an already existing trend.

Our research looks at specific segments of the professional labour market: professions whose access is regulated by public regulation and the traditional professionalisation model, based on strong institutions and peer control, and where the interrelation between digitalisation and differentiation of the professional labour market appears most clearly. In particular, we focus on specific professional profiles (architects, lawyers, journalists and psychologists).

1. From platform thinking to (professional) platform work

We live in the era of the *platform economy* (Srnicek 2017), defined as a digital infrastructure that enables different types of users (clients, suppliers, producers and professionals) to interact and develop markets together, based on network effect logics (Rietveld and Schilling 2021) and the algorithmic management (Stark and Pais 2020) of performances anchored to digital-reputation systems (Origgi and Pais 2018).

Platforms act as *multi-sided markets* (Boudreau and Hagiu 2009; Rochet and Tirole 2006) that aggregate services and re-intermediate the relationship between supply and demand. As new intermediaries in the labour market, platforms can govern the rules of transactions and directly access the data generated by online interactions. Thanks to this process, they also exercise some form of control over interactions and manage opaque mechanisms to develop trust among users (Gandini et al. 2016).

The growing body of literature in this field focuses on the impact of digital platforms –and, in general, digital technologies– as a disruptive innovation capable of altering the rules in terms of working conditions, career paths and rewards (Arcidiacono et al. 2021). However, platform companies are developed with a plurality of practices and organisational sub-designs that could generate differentiated sets of opportunities and risks for professionals.

Despite the fact that the tendency to recruit workers via platforms started with less qualified jobs and more repetitive tasks (Lehdonvirta and Ernkvist 2011), professional jobs (with their flexible contents, implications in terms of autonomy and individualised competition, and need for personal branding) are increasingly in line with the constitutive principles of platforms as intermediation mechanisms, and form a new productive model.

Some scholars have attempted to classify the various forms of platform work. One of the most highly regarded typologies in the literature is provided by De Groen et al. (2016), who distinguish between *online tasks*, based on practices that could be performed exclusively electronically and where the entire working process could be managed entirely online (e.g. Upwork), and *on-location tasks*, which require some physical interaction in an offline space (e.g. Foodora). They also add a further distinction between *low-medium-skill jobs* (e.g. Helpling), which are manual or low-specialized, and *high-skill jobs* (e.g. Zooppa), which require highly specialized skills and certain learning processes obtained through work experience or specific formal credentials. This typology makes it possible to distinguish the heterogeneity of platform work more clearly and to identify the various areas of interest for professional work. However, according to Pesole et al. (2018), in many cases this classification is insufficient to represent the real heterogeneity of the phenomenon, and they therefore attempt to classify workers based on their status in the labour market, the payment they receive and the number of hours worked, identifying almost 45 combinations of platform work, the majority of which are concentrated in high-skill and highly professionalized sectors.

The research carried out by Wood et al. (2019) on platforms such as Upwork, Fiverr, PeoplePerHour and Freelancer.com. has demonstrated how algorithmic management techniques in platforms tend to offer workers high levels of flexibility, autonomy, as well as varied and complex tasks. But at the same time, these mechanisms result in low pay, social isolation, and self-exploitation. Although it has been widely confirmed that the extrinsic conditions of platform work are often unsatisfactory (for example, in terms of levels of income or career advancement), professionals and knowledge workers continue to offer their services on platforms, encouraged above all by vocational aspects or by interest in non-material incentives, such as increased visibility and professional reputation (Nemkova et al. 2019).

2. The transformations of professionalism in Italy: a "within" perspective

Starting in the mid-1970s, particularly with Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1988), a major strand of literature advanced the hypothesis of the degradation of work, emphasising

deskilling and task unbundling. In the sociology of professions, this literature has found particularly fertile ground in the debate regarding the end of the "golden age" of professions (Gorman and Sandefur 2011). Despite this hypothesis of a general decline, professions cannot be conceptualised as equal, homogeneous entities, and are best seen as hierarchically differentiated groups based on varying forms of exclusionary social closure (Saks 2015). The sociology of professions has highlighted the differentiation within professions in terms of prestige, income and power (Freidson 2001), attributed to professional sub-specialities or types of clients (Abel 1985; Parding et al. 2021).

In more recent years, a new phenomenon has emerged: the outsourcing of professional work. Professionals work outside the boundaries of large organisations while maintaining a *de facto* dependency on them. This phenomenon is well highlighted, for example, by the case of the *temporary attorney* as a professional with second-class status, performing tasks that are fragmented, deskilled, intensified, and regimented (Brooks 2011).

In the debate on the decline and differentiation of professional work, the emergence of new technologies and the impact they have on professionalism is not always examined sufficiently. The digitalisation of professional work through platforms represents a discontinuity that requires further interpretative effort. Our aim is try to assess if the diffusion of technologies is causing a new logic of organisation and division of labour, or reinforcing a logic that is already present in the labour market.

The debate over platform work has once again brought to the fore issues that had long been abandoned in the academic literature on the professions, in light of the impact of the digital transition in lowering entry barriers to certain professional fields, allowing even those without formal credentials to opt for jobs and operate in specific qualified segments of the labour market. At the same time, by lowering access barriers and configuring new methods of interaction and matching in professional markets, the platforms act as drivers, changing the characteristics and practices that are necessary to be competitive that are recognized and legitimised in the markets of reference.

According to the existing literature on this issue, the role of digitalisation on professionalism appears ambivalent: some studies minimise the role of the digital world in professional markets, although forms of algorithmic control mean that these professionals working online are granted lower intra-professional status and less professional autonomy. This is due to the low interference in supply and demand between online and offline markets that essentially maintains distinct practices and repertoires of actions, and contains the disruptive effects of digital practices on professional markets (Yao 2020). Other studies highlight how new technologies have changed the relationship between professionals and clients, modifying attitudes regarding ethical aspects – for example, privacy for doctors (Griebel et al. 2017), or checks on the reliability of information and quality of sources for journalists (Manninen 2017). Platforms tend to be represented as the ideal "place" for "transitional work" or for multiple job strategies of the *plural careerist* (Caza et al. 2018), in which many workers who already have stable jobs and income streams decide to take on professional digital jobs as "supplemental earners" (Schor 2020). However, a growing body of research shows that this work appears anything but transitory or residual, but extends over time, making it possible to develop specific professionalisation based on *ad hoc* repertoires of action and skills (Bosma 2020; Driel and Dumitrica 2021). At the same time, the rhetoric of accessory and complementary work does not seem to recognise the growing professionalisation of remote professionals that operate, sometimes exclusively, through platforms (Raval and Pal 2019).

We hypothesise that the diffusion of platforms that match the supply of professional work to demand for it does not undermine the conditions of professional work. On the contrary, this very transformation of professional work might make the platform model attractive.

Although the platformisation of professional work can be interpreted through all the three analytical dimensions outlined in Chapter 1 –within, between, and beyond– the most significant aspect for the discussion of the platformisation of professionalism is "within" (CH 1). In particular, we look at the relationship between the diffusion of professional work platforms and inequalities between professionals within the same profession.

The question that guides our analysis is whether platforms can offer new opportunities at the lower levels of the social stratification of the professions, or whether they do the opposite: strengthen the process of the systematic differentiation and decline of professional positions.

Our analysis focuses on the Italian case, where, since the 1990s, the number of professionals has grown quite considerably (Confprofessioni 2021). Despite this, the effects of digital technology on the professions in Italy have not been sufficiently studied. The academic debate on the effects of platform work on the Italian labour market has focused more on the so-called *riders*, home delivery gig workers, than on highly skilled professionals (Bellini and Lucciarini 2019).

This chapter attempts to address this gap in the Italian debate by examining a specific segment of regulated professions and the traditional professionalisation model, based on strong institutions and peer control. We selected four regulated professions (architects, lawyers, journalists and psychologists), both because they present a high level of professionalization, which allows us to test our hypotheses more clearly, and because of the existing international results that have emerged regarding the digital transformation in the most established professions (Yao 2020).

3. Research design and methods

To analyse the relationship between professionalism and digital platforms, we developed a two-step research design.

The first step was based on the identification of the most important professional work platforms through a general mapping of all work platforms active in Italy, performing Google searches using keywords such as "work online" or "platform work". Having acknowledged the difficulties of accurately quantifying a dynamic and constantly changing phenomenon, from the results that emerged in the first ten pages of results, we selected those that could be defined as work platforms. 150 platforms were identified: 46 online/high-skill; 26 online/low-medium-skill; 22 on-location/high-skill; and 62 on-location/low-medium-skill. In the absence of a national or international register of platform companies, this mapping, although it cannot be considered exhaustive in relation to the Italian platform economy, identified the most active platforms (in terms of visibility and number of registered workers) to include in the study.

The second phase was based on 26 semi-structured interviews with four different profiles (platform workers, platform managers, representatives of professional organisations, platform clients of professional services) in the four selected professional markets. We concentrate on the most important platforms in terms of numbers of users and reputation within their professional group of reference (see Table 1 for details).

Unlike the research carried out in most of the previous literature, our focus on different platforms and professional groups allowed us to compare internal differences in various regulated/protected professional groups, looking at the relation between professional work and platforms.

We adopted an explorative approach in our research, allowing the interviewees' opinions to emerge with regard to the issue of professional digitalisation (with special concern for the role of digital platforms) and the role of professional organisations and what they achieve. The interviews were carried out remotely, either telephonically or by videoconference. Interviews followed an established protocol, with a common section for all four profiles and a profile-specific section for each one, with targeted questions. The common section puts together the personal profile of each interviewee and their particular positioning with respect to the phenomenon under investigation.

The specific section varies with respect to the type of interviewee: the interviews with the managers concentrated on aspects relating to the creation of the platform, such as its design and operating mechanisms, but also reconstructed the motivations of the actors regarding their choice to operate in that specific professional market and the problems they encountered, as well as considering their relationship with professional associations. The interviews with the workers focused on their experience and careers and on the role that the platform played in their professional progression, highlighting advantages and disadvantages. The interviews with professional associations focused on their relationships and positioning with respect to the phenomenon of platforms that brokered professional services in their specific sector. Finally, the client interviews focused more on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the platform-mediated professional relationship with these professionals. Given the difficulty of exhaustively mapping the field of reference, the preference was to triangulate the mapping activity with a qualitative and interpretative research design.

An in-depth analysis was conducted on the content of the interviews, grouping the answers collected into two fundamental thematic cores: the role of platforms as intermediaries and the peculiarity of the organisational model, in an attempt to outline how these two aspects contributed to transforming and differentiating the working activity of these professional groups with respect to their relationships both with providers (the platform) and with clients (i.e. the users of digitally mediated services).

The research design and the type of data analysis adopted were seen to be compatible with the exploratory aims of the study, but some problems and issues were highlighted that will require further investigation and the construction of a specific research agenda on these issues.

Table 5.1   Interviews by gender, role, and platform services

Code	Gender	Role	Services provided
M1	M	Manager, high-skill/On-location platform	Legal
M2	M	Manager, high-skill/On-location platform	Architectural
M3	M	Manager, high-skill/On-location platform	Architectural
M4	F	Manager, low-medium-skill/Online platform	Text Editing
M5	M	Manager, high-skill/Online Platform	Psychology
M6	M	Manager, high-skill/Online and on-location platforms	Architectural
M7	M	Manager, low-medium-skill/Online and on-location platform	Various
M8	F	Manager, high-skill/Online platform	Text Editing
L1	F	Worker, low-medium-skill/Online Platform	Text Editing
L2	M	Worker, high-skill/Online platform	Design
L3	F	Worker, high-skill/Online platform	Architectural
L4	M	Worker, high-skill/On-location platform	Architectural
L5	M	Worker, high-skill/On-location platform	Architectural
L6	M	Worker, low-medium-skill/Online platform	Text Editing
R1	M	Representative of the professional organisation of Milan	Legal

R2	M	Representative of the professional organisation of Tuscany	Journalism
R3	M	Representative of the professional organisation of Piedmont	Psychology
R4	M	Representative of the professional organisation of Liguria	Architectural
C1	M	Platform client – Milan	Architectural
C2	F	Platform client – Aquila	Text Editing
C3	M	Platform client – Lucca	Legal
C4	M	Platform client – Bergamo	Legal
C5	F	Platform client – Bologna	Architectural
C6	F	Platform client – Avellino	Architectural
C7	F	Platform client – Naples	Architectural

4. Findings

As mentioned in the previous section, the first step in our research aimed to quantify the digital platforms that were active in Italy in order to have a clearer picture of their features. From our mapping activity, it emerges that there are almost 150 platforms that intermediate labour supply and demand in Italy. 45.3 per cent intermediate high-skill tasks, and 54.7 per cent deal with low-skill activities. Moreover, 53 per cent are based in Italy and 47 per cent are foreign platforms that also operate in Italy. This is made possible by 44 per cent of the mapped platforms intermediating online tasks and not providing on-location services. This provisional data already shows how the public debate on platform work is largely "short-sighted" with respect to the heterogeneity of the phenomenon, focusing above all on on-location and low-skill activities (such as drivers or riders) which, although slightly in the majority, represent only one portion of platform jobs. In fact, if we focus our attention on professional tasks, over half (56.0 per cent) of these platforms intermediate or deal with expert labour, and nearly one out of five (16.7 per cent) manage occupations that are regulated by a professional guild/association. It is also worth noticing that almost two out of three (64.6 per cent) of the platforms involving professional work provide "online" services (entirely or partly).

To understand this evidence more deeply, we interviewed managers, clients, and workers, exploring two different issues: firstly, the platform as a new intermediary for professionals, which, in some way, competes with or complements professional associations; secondly, the platform as a new organisational system with specific characteristics that modify some typical elements of the professionals' status and ways of organising their work.

4.1 The platform as an intermediary

Looking at the "within" dimension, our research analyses the regulated labour platforms both as intermediaries for matching demand and supply, and also as a new form of work organisation. From the first perspective, finding professionals –traditionally performed through selection mechanisms such as consulting association registers or the recommendations of trusted people– is now carried out on platforms using assessments made by strangers. In analysing these new forms of matching the supply of professional work with demand, our main question is whether the platform reproduces existing or new criteria.

Some platforms maintain traditional quality signals (such as registers) and use the platform for matching clients only with certified professionals.

In the last few months, we have started a process of recruiting psychologists. That is, we have launched a call for tender. We have now selected twelve people, who are already qualified psychologists and are about to start a training course. (M5)

The cases in which platforms do not verify the possession of formal credentials, even when these should be required, as in regulated professions, is more problematic and more frequent: this practice questions the principle of the professions' social closure and has been the subject of disputes brought by professional associations.

Any person who wants to write for us can register on the platform and, in fact, they don't have to be a journalist or a professional editor; the only way we have to classify their competence is through a test. Even when they write "journalist" in their account, it doesn't matter to me. Do you know how many texts I send back to people who are journalists? (M4)

The register started a big fight with us; they also expelled my partner. They created legal hurdles; this means you have to call a professional from their register, and, in some situations, this artificially distorted the market; so, they viciously attack any company that wants to generate new models. (M2)

Platforms and professional associations differ on the principles they use to assess competence: the former uphold a typical market principle, meritocracy, demonstrated through professional experience and regardless of formal certifications; the latter believe that the customer's choice should be limited to professionals who are pre-selected by peers and should be made exclusively on the basis of the principle of trust.

You go to an architect because you know them, not because they're the most suitable for you, not because you have seen their work, or because their taste coincides with yours, but because they're your classmate, your sister's ex-boyfriend. In contrast, we have purely meritocratic relations. The contest is anonymous: you vote for the best project without knowing who they are, and, later, you find out if they are Italian or Turkish, handsome or ugly, young or old, a woman or a man, and so on. (M2)

Would you go to a lawyer you can find on the Internet, who nobody knows, someone who maybe offers you a free first consultation? A lawyer is not like a commodity on Amazon where I look at reviews and decide. The right way to find a lawyer is through word of mouth, where a friend tells you about a person you can trust. Reading about someone on the Internet is not enough for me; I prefer recommendations from a friend, a person I trust. (R1)

It is therefore important to analyse the new trust-building mechanisms. This process is related to the shift from credentialism to reputation: it is assumed that, on the platforms, the informal reference system prevails over the expert system and that the regulators allow it. Some authors have noticed that the heterogeneity of clients is the main cause of the internal stratification of the professions, which prevents homogeneous professional communities being formed. If a professional has adopted an expert system of reference, it implies that they feel part of a

community (of colleagues), whose rules they will adhere to and whose support they might ask for. On the other hand, if their reference system is an informal one, they will not be that interested in their colleagues' judgment and will be more concerned about what their clients/patients think. They will have completely different opinions on how to define a "good" professional: they need to be pleasant, open, pay close attention to what people say, and be ready to meet their needs. The professionals at the base of the pyramid (or the "trainees" in the stratification theorised by Freidson) will be more inclined to follow an informal reference system (Pais and Palmieri 2016), and this can further strengthen their presence on digital platforms. Traditional professionalism considers the clients as incompetent, and protects them through social closure mechanisms. The choice to turn to a platform categorises these kinds of clients –in the eyes of a representative of a professional organisation– as a "second-league clientele".

> It is not a reliable clientele; I would have some reservations, it means that they are really desperate. (R1)

On the platforms the opposite is true: the client is considered capable of evaluating the work of the professional, and their evaluation is used as a sign of professionalism for future clients.

> Then, of course, you can give a rating, and that becomes the criterion for the algorithm, which geolocates and selects. The algorithm makes its selection based on specialisation, location, and rating. If you have a low rating, you receive fewer requests. (M1)

> Customers type in the text they need. Then, they are asked if they have author preferences and to select the type of author they want. So, for example, they can select that they want authors with four stars. Then, they say that, maybe, they want an author who writes about nature because, maybe, the text is about nature. Then they say they only want authors with positive grammar and spelling assessments. And, then, the platform makes a sort of list of all the authors with the required characteristics. Then, from that point onwards, it is the client who chooses one author rather than another, perhaps by going to the profile of each one and reading the evaluations of the texts. (C2)

The trust in a professional generated through reputational mechanisms is combined with trust in the platform. Customers show that they pay attention to signs of reliability.

> Some elements such as the VAT number indicated on the website, a series of references that also lead to a registered office... (C3)

It is interesting to highlight how the introduction of artificial intelligence elements (such as chatbots) are perceived by customers as real interactions –probably seen as communicating with a person– and can strengthen trust in the platform.

> I was looking on the Internet, and I found this platform […]. I started to check it out, look, understand... but, it didn't convince me in the sense that I didn't trust it, obviously. Then, a girl contacted me… do you know when you go to a website, and you see the chat at the bottom right...? This girl contacted me and said to me: "Hey, what exactly

are you looking for? Do you want to try the service?". And I told her a little, but obviously... I was wary. […] Every time I went to the website, the girl contacted me and told me that there had been a lot of positive experiences on the platform. Then, I finally made up my mind […]. I mainly trusted this girl who spoke to me; she inspired me with confidence. (C5)

The spread of platform work is linked to strengthening the market as a dominant regulatory mechanism even in regulated professions. These processes reinforce what Gorman and Sandefur (2011) point to as the emergence of a diversified *professional environment* composed of "commercialized professionalism" (Hanlon 1996), a "hybrid form of professionalism" (Hodgson et al. 2015).

4.2 The platform as a new form of organising work

As regards the platform as an organisational model, our research shows that the platforms are based on *taskification*, mainly matching fragments of professional work to workers. This is a process preceded by exceptional practices, such as the case of franchise law firms offering standardised services to a relatively low-income clientele, which have adopted a highly routinised approach to organising work (van Hoy 1995).

While platform managers and representatives of professional associations agree with this analysis, they, do, however, attribute different meanings to it: for managers, it opens up new markets at a time when demand is falling; for professional associations, it lowers the quality of professional services.

> If lawyers were easy to reach, we would go to them ten times a month for our daily problems. Those who are against the possibility of promoting themselves are the generations of old lawyers who have a position that they do not want to lose. (M1)

> Would you go to a doctor you found on the Internet? Maybe for your corns but not for something serious. For lawyers, platforms are for minor issues: a road accident, a condominium conflict, small medical responsibilities. (R1)

From a broader perspective, a central question is whether this taskification process is inherent to the platform and, therefore, destined to last, or if ways of recomposing work can also be carried out through the platform. From the interviews carried out, one platform seems to be moving precisely in this direction:

> I would like to guarantee the professionals, above all the young professionals, a solid core of hours that allows them to have a decent income every month, and, therefore, have other experiences because, in any case, this is a big problem in our professional sector. That is, we have average incomes, especially in the early years, which are appallingly low. (M5)

This process is also related to one of the central attributes of professionalism (Gorman and Sandefur 2011): the importance of the indeterminate nature of expert knowledge. However, the knowledge mediated by platforms needs to be easily codified, and it cannot uphold a profession's

legitimacy. This is the paradox of platformisation of professionalism: on the one hand, it offers market opportunities for marginalised professionals; on the other, it highlights the growing polarisation of work conditions within each profession.

5. Conclusions

Our findings confirm the hypothesis that platform work, instead of being the driver of the processes that are transforming professions –in a perspective of technological determinism– is a mechanism that reinforces dynamics that are already in place in the expert labour segment, and leads to the emergence of what may be termed 'platform professionalism' as a variant of organisational professionalism (Evetts 2006).

The spread of professional platform work is not undermining the conditions of professional work. In fact, the transformations of professional work might have made the platform model attractive due to intra-professional competition and the processes of marginalisation (Butler et al. 2012) that are linked to the erosion of prerogatives such as high salaries, high levels of autonomy, job security and social status. Similarly to what happened in the 1960s and 1970s, a post-industrial transition has changed the nature of professional work and has made the interpenetration of organisational logic with professionalism possible. This should not lead to an analysis that is guided by perspectives of social determinism. On the contrary, from the analysis of the interaction between technological and social transformations in professional labour markets, we have observed the emergence of new paradoxes and tensions *within* (but also *between* and *beyond*) professions and their social contexts.

From the data collected, it clearly emerges that the market of professional services represents a significant share of platform work, despite the debate often centring on low-skilled manual workers such as riders or drivers. In particular, the expansion of platforms for professional services mostly concerns all professions that do not benefit from a regulatory and protection system run by a professional association and, therefore, are more exposed to such a "plat-firming" trend. However, even within the more "protected" professions, we can note the importance of platforms in reinforcing internal differentiation.

As new intermediaries, platforms contribute to a shift from credentialism to reputation as a more informal system of evaluating professional skills and capabilities. This process strengthens internal differentiation in professional markets by encouraging a "race to the bottom" by further segmenting customers, and a further division of labour among a given profession's scope of practice. The clientele of platform services is increasingly low value, price-oriented, and gives little recognition to fair and high-quality service.

As new forms of organisation, through the taskification and codification processes typical of algorithmic management, platforms reduce the complexity of the tasks performed by professionals, undermining the legitimacy of professional workers as holders of expert knowledge and exposing them even further to market competition and to impoverished working conditions.

In this scenario, professionals who work mainly online consider the platform as a showcase and self-promotion tool above all. Greater visibility on the platform is perceived as an essential tool to ensure employability over time. On the other hand, qualified professionals who work on on-location platforms are characterised by a greater individualisation of risks because they must balance the need to remain competitive within the platform (where pay tends to be lower) and the image and reputation that they must maintain offline, in order not to devalue acquired competences and professionalism. In fact, platforms tend to attract professionals who are less experienced or marginal in the labour market. These professionals use platforms as a place to "train" and to overcome access barriers in the professional labour market. However, this is not without risks because the platforms often try to limit the usability of the human and social capital acquired outside the platform, diminishing the autonomy of such professionals.

In conclusion, it can be assumed that platforms tend to relate to workers as "users" of these services, similarly to the way they see their clients, transforming the nature of work from a right to a service (Arcidiacono et al. 2021). This is an approach that is consistent with further liberalising professional markets and raises the issue of the regulatory dimension of platforms, which take advantage of the legislative vacuum to put themselves forward as "private regulators" (Cutolo et al. 2019), in potential conflict with professional associations. Accordingly, it would be particularly interesting to go more deeply into assessing the regulatory role of professional associations as actors that –so far– have acted conservatively, but are beginning to consider the possibility of becoming, in their turn, the promoters of a new model of digital organisation for professional services.

6. Acknowledgments

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