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**Platform Work in Municipal Contexts:
A Multi-Level Governance Analysis of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis makes an original contribution to the emergent field of platform urbanism by analysing platform work governance in three cities using a multi-level governance framework. Multi-level governance is operationalised in the form of four interrelated indicators; it is used to conduct qualitative policy analysis in Madrid (Spain), Milan (Italy), and San Francisco (USA). The four indicators capture 1. the roles of non-state actors, 2. the relationship between governmental levels regarding platform work, 3. the availability of relevant competences on municipal level, and 4. the involvement of the municipality in the policy debate on platform work. Each indicator raises different questions that guide data collection and analysis as well as the consideration of the contexts within which a municipality responds to platform work. Empirical data is generated from 17 extensive semi-structured interviews with 19 local participants from academia, trade unions, and municipal and regional governments – including elite interview participants – and from documentary analysis of 14 municipal policy documents. The thesis produces several significant findings. Above all, multi-level governance generates new evidence on why municipalities govern platform work in distinct ways. Municipal responses in San Francisco and Madrid are influenced by other governmental levels and respective legislation targeting workers' misclassification as self-employed. The perception of platform work as remedy against poverty by officials in San Francisco and as source of precarity in Madrid reinforces openness and resistance to the phenomenon, respectively. In Milan, tensions between a desire to promote innovative platform services and a commitment to workers' rights result in municipal engagement with workers and representatives of digital labour platforms. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the recognition of platform work as essential service contributed to a continuation of earlier municipal responses. Moreover, the thesis presents evidence demonstrating the difference between platform governance and platform *work* governance: city governments often treat platform work differently than other aspects of the platform economy. Altogether, the thesis strongly suggests that even in uncertain regulatory environments, city governments can play a decisive role in mitigating workers' precarity or promoting platform work.

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Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: Maximilian Kriz

Signature: _____

Abbreviations

AB 5	Assembly Bill 5
ACTA	Associazione Consulenti Del Terziario Avanzato
AI	Artificial Intelligence
APS	Asociación de Plataformas de Servicios bajo demanda
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CGIL	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro
CSIL	Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori
CWA	California Workforce Association
ES	Spain
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
IFTF	Institute for the Future
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISTAT	Istituto nazionale di statistica
IT	Italy
MDS	Most-different-systems
MLG	Multi-level governance
MSS	Most-similar-systems
NIDIL	Nuove Identità di Lavoro
O2O	Online-to-offline
OEA	Office for Economic Analysis
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEWD	Office of Economic and Workforce Development
OLSE	Office of Labor Standards Enforcement
OML	Osservatorio Mercato di Lavoro
PPE	Personal protective equipment
PROP 22	Proposition 22
PUA	Pandemic Unemployment Assistance
RQ	Research question
TRADE	Trabajador Autónomo Económicamente Dependiente
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores

UIL	Unione Italiana del Lavoro
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
USD	US Dollar
WEF	World Economic Forum

1. Introduction

1.1 Platform workers in cities: “humans as a service”

In March 2022, more than one hundred delivery workers of platforms Deliveroo and UberEats demonstrated against the lack of sick and holiday pay as well as reductions in earnings per delivery in front of fast-food restaurants in Belfast (Irish Times, 2022). A month earlier, couriers of Turkish delivery platforms Yemeksepeti and Hepsiburada refused to work for seven days and blocked roads in Istanbul with their scooters in protest against low pay and lack of safety equipment (Daily Sabah, 2022). In August 2022, the Indian platform Swiggy experienced mass walkouts of its workers in the city of Bangalore. They demanded a fixed hourly salary in line with comparable unionised sectors instead of earnings based on the distance driven and number of jobs executed, as well as changes in how customer feedback affects their earnings (Deccan Herald, 2022). Three months later, more than eight hundred workers of Thai platform Grab demonstrated in downtown Bangkok against the company’s decision to cap workers’ hours, the latest in a series of local protests affecting Grab (Bangkok Post, 2022).

What these workers – though being dispersed across cities around the globe – have in common is their activity as digital platform workers. Digital platform work, henceforth referred to as platform work or app-based work, describes work allocated by “location-based applications (apps) [...] to individuals in a specific geographical area”, according to the International Labour Organization ILO (2018: xv). Such work differs from crowdwork, which is carried out online, for example transcription tasks. Crucially, digital labour platforms promoting platform work thrive on cities and depend on them for their operation. As Barns (2014), Leszczynski (2019) and Sadowski (2020) argued, platforms require the infrastructure, customer base, and population density of urban areas to realise their online-to-offline business model (McAfee et al., 2017: 186), hence leading the scholars to develop the concept of “platform urbanism”. App-based workers have become central elements of urban life over the past decade due to the wide range of services they provide, ranging from delivery and ride-hailing to domestic cleaning services, yet also due to frequent demonstrations against working conditions in public spaces.

While protests are the most visible expressions of the tensions emanating from the platform economy in cities, numerous court cases reflect the real challenges of app-based workers. Their classification as self-employed ‘independent contractors’ by major platform companies deprives them of social security and benefits to which individuals in standard employment relationships are entitled (International Labour Organization, 2018: 59). Workers’ classification has been criticised by numerous studies and reports (Muñoz de Bustillo Llorente et al., 2016; Bajwa et al., 2018; Esbenshade et al., 2019; Palier, 2019) as misclassification and bogus self-employment, though, since platforms exert control over their earnings, task allocation, and rating algorithms. That status, in turn, is considered a main source of app-based workers’ precarity. Standing (2018) observed the growth of a global “precariat”, a group of workers in unstable, insecure work arrangements facing an erosion of rights and benefits, and platform work has been regarded a driver of that trend (Kalleberg et al., 2018: 21). Yet, app-based workers’ precarity has additional features, for instance the opacity of algorithmic management by platforms and its consequences on earnings. In a speech in 2006, at a time when crowdworking through platforms such as Amazon’s Mechanical Turk first emerged, former Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos referred to platform workers as “humans as a service” (Prassl, 2018: 3). His expression encapsulates both the convenience and downsides of such digitally enabled work: internet and mobile apps have facilitated the outsourcing of tasks, yet that flexibility has come at the cost of workers’ rights and welfare. Casualisation and increasing informality of work are not new phenomena per se (Quinlan, 2012), yet platforms contribute to their manifestation.

For some workers and their representatives, legal proceedings against platform companies have represented the most promising avenue towards being classified as employees and gaining respective benefits. Alas, court cases have hitherto been unable to settle the question of legal classification, and thus entitlement to social benefits, in many countries: either because of contrasting rulings within countries, such as in Italy (Cherry et al., 2017), or because platforms have failed to comply with them, for example in Spain (Brave New Europe, 2022). Similarly, the UK Supreme Court’s 2021 judgment, though regarded a landmark decision, had limited impact. While the Court obliged ride-hailing platform Uber to pay its workers the national living wage, the ruling did not establish an employment relationship between the platform and its British workers and did not apply to its delivery branch UberEats (Peiris, 2021). As a consequence, mitigating platform workers’ precarity remains an urgent challenge worldwide.

Cities find themselves at the forefront of the tensions created by the platform economy. On one hand, urban consumers benefit from the services offered by platforms conveniently via mobile applications and executed by workers, and urban workforces enjoy access to a new pool of jobs that has been said to be more accessible than standard employment (Petropoulos et al., 2019: 102). Both these advantages became particularly relevant during the Covid-19 pandemic, when urban dwellers turned to platforms for alternatives to in-person consumption and additional income sources. On the other, the growth of precarious groups of workers poses challenges to the quality of work in cities, and workers' discontent with working conditions expresses itself in city-level protests. Cities are the spaces where promises and perils of platform work collide. Considering workers' struggles to access employment-related benefits as well as both the insufficiency of legislation to mitigate their precarity and cities' role in fuelling the operation of platforms, municipalities find themselves in a key position in discussions surrounding app-based work. Investigations of city governments' responses to growth and tensions of platform work hence are pertinent.

Cities' municipal governments have been shown to manage platform work in different ways, as classifications (Morell, 2018; Vith et al., 2019) of cities as "monitors", "regulators", "promoters", and "collaborators" of platforms underline. However, the reasons for those diverse municipal policy responses are poorly understood or limited to single cities. Earlier insightful studies, above all by Thelen (2018) or Pilaar (2018), have focused on national governments when investigating why governments regulate, enable, or promote platforms. Meanwhile, research on municipalities' various approaches towards platforms has emphasised platforms that do not rely on workers. For instance, Aguilera et al.'s (2019) or Ardura Urquiaga et al.'s (2019) insightful analyses of why European cities respond differently to the platform economy examined the example of Airbnb. Moreover, studies on the regulation of digital labour platforms in cities have often revealed city-specific factors that explain the responses of the respective city government (Brail, 2018; Zanatta et al., 2018). Still, they have done so outside of an analytical framework that could allow for comparison between cases, and they have not emphasised other potential influences to which the platform regulation literature alerts. It is the objective of this thesis to address that gap in three ways: the first aim is to focus on municipal responses to digital labour platforms and platform work, instead of platforms that do not rely on workers for their operation. The second aim is to analyse the influences behind city governments' responses – asking why,

not just how, municipalities manage the growth of app-based work. The third aim is to propose and operationalise an analytical framework that can alert to the potential influences on municipal approaches to the phenomenon across cities. Filling this knowledge gap is intended to deepen understanding of why certain city governments are more inclined to support platform workers' interests while others take a laissez-faire approach towards presence and growth of such work. The analysis moreover reveals to what extent municipalities can mitigate workers' precarity, producing insights for both future policy and research.

1.2 Research aims and approach: explaining platform work governance in cities

Based on the discussion of the literature and the knowledge gap emerging from it (Chapters 2 and 3), the thesis responds to the following three research questions (RQs):

1. What kinds of policy interventions have city governments used to respond to the rise in platform work?
2. Which influences have shaped municipal responses to platform work?
3. How did the Covid-19 pandemic affect municipal responses to platform work?

This thesis is informed by governance approaches to platform regulation in cities (Tabascio et al., 2021; Voytenko Palgan et al., 2021), which stress the management of non-state actors' interests by municipal governments within institutional structures to explain a policy outcome. It adopts a multi-level governance (MLG) approach to analyse qualitative data from three cases: San Francisco (US), Milan (Italy), and Madrid (Spain). It is the first study to employ and operationalise such an MLG approach in the platform work literature, and it will demonstrate its value for revealing the influences that shape how municipalities govern, or respond to, app-based work. In other words, MLG points to the distribution of responsibilities and competences pertaining to platform work among different governmental levels. In combination with how city officials perceive app-based work, this aspect emerges as significant factor for explaining why city governments manage the phenomenon differently. Importantly, the MLG framework allows for comparison between cases and thus underlines the city-specific influences behind the respective municipal response. This

research furthermore adopts a case study approach to account for the social, economic, and political contexts of each city in which platform work emerges.

The thesis is based on qualitative data collection, which consisted of documentary analysis of 14 policy papers from the three cities, enlightening the elements of their respective municipalities' approaches towards app-based work, and 17 remote interviews in synchronous as well as asynchronous form with 19 participants. Two interview rounds – a first round with local academic experts and a second one with policymakers and workers' representatives – delved deeper into the trends identified during documentary analysis and served to reveal details of MLG indicators in the three cases. Documents and interview transcripts underwent deductive and inductive coding cycles (Woodyatt et al., 2016: 744) and were analysed in QSR NVivo. Overall, this research constitutes policy analysis since it investigates the influences on a policy outcome, employing documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews within a case study framework (Browne et al., 2018: 1034).

Through the qualitative research approach, the analysis of platform work governance in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco produces several significant insights for understanding why municipalities respond to app-based work in diverse ways. First, the MLG framework highlights the influence of different indicators on municipal responses, showing how a globally present phenomenon evokes diverging responses by municipalities: in contrast to earlier theoretical accounts of platform governance, the present analysis demonstrates that the influences on municipal responses uncovered previously – limited municipal competences (Bond, 2015), non-state actors' interests (Aguilera et al., 2019), or the policy priorities of city officials (Flores et al., 2017) – need to be considered in combination. Therefore, in theoretical terms, MLG provides a more comprehensive and nuanced account of platform work governance in cities. Second, the analysis highlights that platform regulation and responses to platform work in cities are not necessarily synonymous, even if they concern the same platform. San Francisco, for instance, demonstrates how municipal officials seek to manage the presence of Uber and similar ride-hailing platforms through a dedicated congestion tax but recognise app-based work as positive outcome for unemployed residents. Third, the research strongly suggests that even in uncertain regulatory environments and despite conflicting interests of other stakeholders or pressure from platforms, municipalities play a key role in managing the tensions between workers and platforms. Using soft policy instruments, city governments can contribute to mitigating

workers' precarity or promoting platform work. This insight, in turn, holds great relevance for municipal policymakers seeking to manage the growth of app-based work in cities.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The remainder of this thesis is structured in nine chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 will discuss the relevant literature on platform work, demonstrating the intrinsic connection between that type of work and cities, and highlight how earlier academic studies have investigated governmental regulation of and intervention in the platform economy. The fourth chapter will elaborate on the methodological underpinnings of this research and defend the qualitative research methods employed to collect and analyse data. Chapters 5 to 7 will present the findings for three case studies – San Francisco, Milan, and Madrid – whereas Chapter 8 will address the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on municipal responses to platform work in all three cases. A discussion of the findings will be subject of Chapter 9, while the tenth chapter will conclude the thesis by suggesting implications for future policy and research.

Concretely, the main arguments and findings of each chapter constitute as follows. Chapter 2 will review the literature to demonstrate that precarious work conditions and reliance on cities are fundamental components of digital labour platforms' DNA. This results from platforms' online-to-offline business model – being “geographically tethered” (Woodcock et al., 2020: n.p.) in urban conglomerates – as well as from their reliance on independent contractors who lack access to employment-related social benefits (Hooker et al., 2022: 9). Discussing the latest evidence from academic studies and reports by international organisations, the chapter will identify four main elements of app-based workers' precarity emanating from these characteristics: low, irregular pay; the opacity of algorithmic management; health and safety risks when executing services; and the lack of social protection stemming from workers' widespread misclassification as self-employed. Furthermore, the chapter will emphasise the urgency of studying platform work governance from an urban perspective by pointing to the increasing number of protests by app-based workers worldwide as well as the inability of court rulings to establish employment relationships between platforms and workers. It will also be highlighted how platform managers, far from being “neutral facilitators of [...] digital commerce” (Leszczynski, 2019:

4), have sought to influence policy and regulation on various governmental levels, and how city governments have responded differently to their presence.

Chapter 3 will continue the discussion of the existing literature while zooming in on the academic debate surrounding platform work governance. It will argue that the common emphasis on categorisation and classification of urban-level regulation or governance modes, instead of categorising the influences behind municipal responses, comes at the cost of explanatory power. This creates the need for an analytical framework that provides a more holistic picture of why city governments govern platform work in particular ways. Informed by the literature, the chapter will justify the use of multi-level governance (MLG) to meet these requirements and discuss how the concept should be understood, modified, and operationalised to create the greatest value for research on municipal responses to app-based work. It will propose a novel operationalisation of MLG through four qualitative indicators, to which data from three case studies will later be subjected: indicator 1 on roles, views, and involvement of non-state actors in respective governance processes; indicator 2 on the relationship between governmental levels regarding platform work; indicator 3 on the availability of competences and policy instruments on municipal level; and lastly, indicator 4 on the involvement of the municipality in the policy debate on platform work. Each case will later be shown to reflect a distinct MLG arrangement, or combination of city-specific values of the four indicators.

Turning to methodological choices of this research, Chapter 4 will proceed to justifying the choice of qualitative research methods and outline my ontological and epistemological foundations which inform that choice. A brief overview of the methodological and substantial effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the research project will be followed by an in-depth account of the diverse stages of the data collection and analysis processes. For example, it will be explained how a horizon scan of 73 cities led to the selection of San Francisco, Milan, and Madrid as case studies. Even though the pandemic made recruitment of participants and conducting interviews more challenging, I ensured uninterrupted data collection and achievement of data saturation through several mitigation measures. These measures included the use of remote conferencing software Zoom, triangulation of data sources, and greater emphasis on documentary analysis. The participation of elite interviewees – holding influential positions in respective municipal or regional governments

and thus well placed to provide insights into motivations and processes of municipal policies on platform work – contributed particular depth to primary data.

Chapter 5 will present the analysis of the first case study, San Francisco, and enlighten the influences behind the city government's response to the growth of platform work. Its department for workforce development considers such work a positive outcome for local jobseekers, despite awareness of the precarious conditions platforms perpetuate. The application of MLG shows how the municipality tries to balance the benefits of hosting a thriving tech sector and its social externalities within the limits of its competences, while state and federal governments continue to oppose the misclassification of workers as independent contractors. At the same time, the case study unveils the forces of what some might consider the downside of platform capitalism, namely the propensity of business interests to use financial capital to influence governance processes, create a favourable regulatory environment, and undermine potentially wide-ranging legislation that would classify app-based workers as employees.

The case of Milan in Chapter 6 will explore different underlying influences on the municipal management of platform work in contrast to San Francisco. Insufficient national regulation of platform work and pressure from other Italian city governments to resolve tensions between platforms and workers have led the municipality to adopt a proactive approach and search for local solutions. However, its ambitions have pushed the city government to the limits of its competences, where it partly relies on the cooperation of non-state actors to realise its initiatives. The use of health and safety standards and of transport policy are creative ways of supporting workers' interests, yet the most promising project, a 'Riders Spot' for platform workers, has been delayed due to platforms' reluctance to finance the initiative.

In Chapter 7, the third and final case study of Madrid will demonstrate yet another municipal approach towards app-based work, with a distinct set of influences highlighted by the MLG arrangement. Madrid's municipal department responsible for labour affairs explicitly refuses to consider platform work as option for local jobseekers and does not engage in debates surrounding that type of work. Importantly, the roles of different governmental levels – national, regional, and municipal – are fundamentally shaped by the Spanish Rider Law, a

national law classifying platform workers as employees. The regional government has chosen to act as mediator between platform workers and the state but, just as the municipality, holds no formal competences that could impact app-based workers' entitlement to social benefits. Meanwhile, the city government's role in legislative efforts is confined, and accepted by municipal officials, to being a pilot city where the Rider Law's effects will become visible. This governmental distribution of responsibilities also influences the involvement of non-state actors, concretely workers' representatives and platform companies, who are forced to engage on governmental levels other than the municipal one or resort to tools outside the policy arena.

Considering the Covid-19 pandemic's unique challenge to municipal policymakers and its effect on the growth of app-based work in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco, Chapter 8 will analyse the extent to which the pandemic changed the municipal responses unveiled in the previous chapters. Significantly, it will underline how the special historical circumstances brought pre-existing attitudes towards app-based work to the fore and put other policy issues at the top of municipal agendas. The stability of each city government's response resulted from particular changes revealed by the MLG indicators. San Francisco's case reflected increased preoccupation about poverty and homelessness as well as a recognition of platform workers as essential to local residents and businesses in times of lockdown. Meanwhile, Milan's municipality pursued its two-pronged approach of business support and defending workers' rights. The city government in Madrid, whose officials previously assigned little urgency to platform work, further deprioritised the phenomenon against the backdrop of rising unemployment. Temporary support mechanisms for self-employed workers provided by higher governmental levels in all three cities might have contributed to the absence of more significant municipal actions in protection of workers' rights, even if platform workers mostly missed out on these.

Despite the contrasting responses to app-based work and the various contexts within which the issue is governed, the discussion chapter (Chapter 9) will reveal underlying similarities across the three cases and present lessons for platform work governance that can be drawn from them. These lessons include the significance of municipal officials' perception of app-based work in shaping responses to the phenomenon, the difference between platform regulation and platform work governance in cities, and the influential role city governments can play in mitigating workers' precarity or promoting such work. Crucially, it will be shown

how the lessons reflect both the significant position of city governments in managing app-based work as well as the flexibility of MLG arrangements. Even though restricted legislative competences or the roles of non-state actors limit the influence of municipalities in platform work governance, flexibility in terms of soft policy instruments or the ability to set municipal policy priorities grants city officials power in supporting workers or promoting platforms. These constitute significant insights for the study of platform work governance.

Ultimately, Chapter 10 will conclude this thesis by emphasising contributions and limitations of the present research as well as by offering recommendations for future policy and research. The study's contributions to academic knowledge are threefold: first, the theoretical contribution consists of the novel conceptualisation and application of MLG to platform work governance, a first in the respective scholarly debate, as well as of MLG's value in revealing the influence of four indicators on municipal responses. Second, the methodological contribution relates to the use of a horizon scan in identifying noteworthy cases regarding the municipal management of app-based work around the world. Third, the empirical contribution reflects the generation of new data on the governance of platform work, including during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco through semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. Furthermore, the chapter will outline potential limitations in spatial, temporal, and methodological terms and how they have been mitigated. Lastly, the final section will build on the findings from this analysis to stress city governments' influential position in the governance of app-based work, despite constrained competences, contrasting interests of other stakeholders, or opposition from platform companies. The thesis will now discuss the literature on the connection between platform work, precarity, and cities.

2. Literature review

This chapter will make the case that it is the very nature of digital labour platforms, the “coming together of socio-technical and business practices” (Langley et al., 2017: 6), which both contributes to workers’ precarity and puts cities at the forefront of tensions between workers and platforms. Concretely, this nature consists of platforms’ online-to-offline business model – being “geographically tethered” (Woodcock et al., 2020: n.p.) in cities – as well as of their reliance on independent contractors. The chapter will present the argument by reviewing the existing literature on digital labour platforms, platform work, and the digitalisation of work, drawing on scholarly articles as well as studies by research institutes and international organisations. It will discuss the latest evidence on the impact of platforms on workers and urban areas, thus highlighting the precarity platforms perpetuate, the growing protests of workers around the world, and the role of municipalities in shaping the urban contexts in which platforms and app-based work emerge.

The literature review will present its argument in three steps. First, it will demonstrate how the emergence of digital labour platforms epitomises a broader trend towards flexible yet often insecure work arrangements. In combination, the decoupling of work and welfare alongside technological advances such as cloud computing have created fertile conditions for the rise of app-based work. The second section will turn to the scholarly debate on the precarity exacerbated by platform work and highlight four drivers of precarity: low, irregular pay; the opacity of algorithmic management; health and safety risks when executing services; and the lack of social protection stemming from workers’ widespread misclassification as self-employed. These elements result from platforms’ use of independent contractors, the application of algorithmic tools, as well as the online-to-offline business model which creates “physical risk” (Schor et al., 2017: 8) for workers. Platforms’ aspiration to be “lean” (Srnicek, 2017b: 49) and reduce costs, both costs of equipment as well as pension or insurance contributions, shifts risks and responsibilities on to workers. The urban aspect of platform work – and the intrinsic connection between platforms and cities – will be subject of the third section. Highlighting the clash between platforms’ “embeddedness” and “disembeddedness” (Howson et al., 2021: 634) in cities, the section will show how their concentration of value generated by globally dispersed workforces has been said to contrast with the urban contexts on which they depend and thrive. In fact, platforms’ high dependence on cities has been labelled “parasitic” (Avermaete, 2021: n.p.).

However, dependence has increasingly become mutual as customers favour their services, granting platforms greater political influence (Culpepper et al., 2020). This insight, in turn, will put the role of city governments in managing app-based work into the spotlight and form the springboard for the subsequent conceptual literature review in Chapter 3.

2.1 Platforms' emergence amid the digitalisation of work

The rise of platforms and the spread of platform work starting in the early 2000s result from a confluence of factors. Widening internet access and use of digital tools by companies, alongside a trend towards the “unbundling” (Medium, 2018: n.p.) of jobs into smaller, temporary tasks, have given impetus to digitally mediated jobs sharing features of more traditional work arrangements, such as part-time jobs. Platform work can hence be considered symptomatic of the spreading use of hardware and software in increasingly service-based labour markets (Kenney et al., 2016). The rise of such work is not necessarily problematic, as studies have observed both workers' preference for flexible work arrangements (Vallas, 2018: 52; Wilkinson et al., 2022) and customers' appetite for platform services (Prassl, 2018: 25). Yet, the same flexibility and subsequent lack of employment-related benefits have also sparked concerns about workers' welfare amid the precarious working conditions associated with platforms (Petropoulos et al., 2019: 101).

2.1.1 Work in the digital age

The automation of formerly manual tasks is an old phenomenon that is linked to the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th century (Prassl, 2018: 9), yet recent advances in computing power and machine learning offer the potential of increasingly substituting rather than complementing labour (Tegmark, 2017). Despite claims that automation and one of its most recent expressions through digitalisation (Caruso, 2018: 382) would lead to the “collapse of work” (Jenkins et al., 1979: 1) and rising unemployment (Frey et al., 2017: 38), digitalisation has been found to change the nature of work. Latest evidence (Hötte et al., 2022) suggests that digitalisation does not destroy jobs, but rather replaces them and changes their characteristics: “the reinstated jobs qualitatively differ from the jobs replaced” (ibid.: n.p.). Coupled with a decline in industrial sectors and a trend towards a “weightless economy” (Coyle, 1997: viii) based on services and the “knowledge economy”, jobs have

emerged in the service industry with increasingly digital characteristics: from internet use to data analysis skills (Palier, 2019: 119).

At the same time, the link between work and welfare has weakened. Many authors (Neisser et al., 1994: 46; Stillerman et al., 2016; Forrester, 2019) see the 1970s as starting point for what Vitaud (Medium, 2018: n.p.) called the “unbundling” of jobs. The “unbundling” refers to the progressive breakdown of the social contract between employer and employee, resulting in a growing number of workers in developed countries without access to social benefits. According to Kalleberg et al. (2018: 5), that trend marked an “emergence of a new stage in the political economy of modernity” with a higher quantity of work arrangements without employment-related protections, such as holiday pay or sick leave. Thus, rather than observing the end of work and the replacement of human labour due to automation and digitalisation – as feared (Jenkins et al., 1979), hoped (Goodin, 2001; Resnikoff, 2018), or predicted (Frey et al., 2017; OECD, 2018) – a growing number of workers in developed countries face shrinking welfare provisions. Taking the example of the UK, Taylor et al. (2017) found that while the country performs well in creating jobs, it does so at the expense of underemployment and one-sided flexibility, with companies being able to hire and fire more easily, putting workers in precarious positions.

This is not the only effect of digitalisation on the world of work: new digital tools have also contributed to higher productivity in high-skilled sectors, including coding, consulting, or medicine (Palier, 2019: 119). Nonetheless, the accelerating trend towards a polarisation of labour markets has been said to create a growing group of temporary, low-paid jobs with few social protections (Morel, 2015). Such trend towards a more flexible, service-based, and underemployed global workforce led Standing (2018) to coin the phrase of “precariat”: a “mass class defined by unstable labour arrangements, lack of identity, and erosion of rights” which “labour[s] outside fixed workplaces and standard labour hours” (ibid.: 1). Put differently, changes in the composition of economies towards growing service sectors, and facilitated by the spread of hardware (internet, mobile phones) and software (mobile applications, data processing) (Kenney et al., 2016: 64), have favoured the rise of temporary, on-demand jobs (McAfee et al., 2017: 14). The digitalisation of economic activity through digital intermediation, online marketplaces, and digital transactions (Warhurst et al., 2019) has created a booming digital service industry with substantial demand for low-paid labour needed to execute tasks, or “gigs” (Bollier, 2016: 36). Platform companies have emerged as

most significant actors in this new digital service economy (Srnicsek, 2017a: 254), as shown next.

Table 1: Categorisation, characteristics, and examples of digital labour platforms.

	Digital labour platforms	
Name	1. Crowdwork platform	2. Geographically tethered platform
Alternative names	“Microtask platform” (International Labour Organization, 2018: xv), “cloudwork platform” (Woodcock et al., 2020: n.p.), freelancing platform	Online-to-offline (O2O) platform
International Labour Organization’s (2018: xv) definition	“[W]eb-based platforms, where work is outsourced through an open call to a geographically dispersed crowd”	“[L]ocation-based applications (apps) which allocate work to individuals in a specific geographical area”
Examples of platforms	Amazon Mechanical Turk, Upwork, Clickworker, Mylittlejob, Fiverr	Uber, Deliveroo, Glovo, Care.com, Lyft, DoorDash, Swiggy
Examples of tasks executed by workers	Transcription, translation, data processing, content moderation	Ride-hailing, delivery (food/groceries/goods), domestic services, caregiving services

2.1.2 The gig economy: new opportunities for a flexible, digital workforce

Platforms are intermediaries which use digital tools such as the internet or mobile applications to connect service providers or workers with clients, earning income by withholding a share from each digital payment workers generate (Prassl, 2018: 15). Platforms emerged in the early 2000s due to a combination of innovations. Kenney et al. (2016: 64) regarded the “algorithmic revolution and cloud computing” as foundations for the rise of the platform economy, as they allow platforms to process large quantities of data from customers, business partners (for example shops or restaurants), and workers. Crucially, increased internet and mobile phone access facilitates the spread of platforms to ever more users, workers, and regions around the globe (World Economic Forum, 2018b: 8).

While platforms do not necessarily rely on a large workforce to execute services but sometimes only serve as intermediaries between individuals, such as in the case of Airbnb and similar “sharing” platforms (Davidson et al., 2016: 216), digital labour platforms do. In “digital labour platforms” (International Labour Organization, 2018: xv), workers can either be part of the “crowd”, executing services using a computer without the need for face-to-face interaction, or provide gigs (Vallas, 2018: 50): Table 1 offers an overview over both types. In the latter case, one refers to “O2O”, or “online-to-offline” platforms (McAfee et al., 2017: 186), including prominent ones like Uber, Deliveroo, Lyft, or Glovo. These are “geographically tethered”, Howson et al. (2021: 633) argued, because the execution of their services is contingent on a specific location. For example, Uber rides require an app-based worker to drive a customer from point A to point B, while Glovo deliveries need to be transported to a local address. These platforms hence “allocate work to individuals in a specific geographical area”, according to the International Labour Organization’s (2018: xv) definition: put differently, online-to-offline platform work cannot be done remotely, or online. This key feature holds consequences both for working conditions and platforms’ intrinsic connection with urban areas, as will be argued later.

Over the past two decades, geographically tethered labour platforms, henceforth simply referred to as platforms, have become increasingly substantial parts of labour markets and have given rise to the “gig economy” (Woodcock et al., 2020: n.p.). Due to the elusive and flexible nature of platform work, and the inability of household surveys or tax returns to capture respective workforces, determining its exact extent has proven challenging (Abraham et al., 2017). Yet, recent studies on platform work in European countries concluded that although the number of platform workers remains small, it has experienced steady growth. Based on an online panel survey of almost 40,000 responses, Urzi Brancati et al. (2020) found that the number of platform workers was “increasing slowly but steadily in Europe” (ibid.: 4), particularly among those who engage in app-based work for less than twenty hours per week. According to the authors’ estimates, around 8.5% of respondents pursue such work to a greater or lesser extent in Europe. In the UK, estimates range between 2.8 to 5 million platform workers (Wilkinson et al., 2022: 3). The circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing people to find alternatives to both in-person shopping and income sources, represented a catalyst that increased demand for platform services as well as platform work (Robinson, 2020; Hooker et al., 2022: 13). Furthermore, though relevant

research has focused on the Global North, as Artioli (2018: 25) stressed, app-based work is especially widespread in South-East Asian countries (Woodcock et al., 2020). That type of work also spans a growing range of sectors. While delivery and ride-hailing platforms have been at the centre of public attention due to workers' protests and court cases, app-based work can also be found in domestic and household work, for instance cleaning and care work (Woodcock et al., 2020). Though less visible, one study (De Ruyter et al., 2019: 41) found that some domestic labour platforms are considerably larger than Uber, above all the US platform Care.com: its international workforce was estimated by De Ruyter et al. to be more than 6.5 million, compared to Uber's 160,000.

Platforms enjoy great popularity not just among consumers due to the variety of services provided (Prassl, 2018: 25; Culpepper et al., 2020), but also among workers. Increased flexibility compared to regular employment is often cited as main reason for why individuals choose that type of work (Wilkinson et al., 2022). Platforms moreover promise greater autonomy, entrepreneurship, and additional income to their workers (Vallas, 2018: 52): the classification as self-employed by platforms conveys an image of control over extent and conditions of work, even if that perception of autonomy has been questioned (Caruso, 2018: 389). Furthermore, Pollio (2019: 761) hailed the opportunity to create microentrepreneurs who monetise "idle assets". Platform work would allow individuals to earn income by executing gigs in their spare time and using their own scooters or bikes, although Forrester (2019) disagreed with the view that such work equals entrepreneurship: "there is little room in their jobs for creativity, change or innovation" (ibid.: n.p.). Notably, app-based work is widely considered to be more accessible than standard employment and offers "unemployed or underemployed [...] a new source of income" (Petropoulos et al., 2019: 102). It represents "an opportunity for those who are out of work (and unlikely to find work in the mainstream economy)", in Palier's (2019: 120) view.

Thus, platform work and the gig economy are expressions of the increasing digitalisation of work and the growth of service sectors. At the same time, they epitomise a trend towards more flexible work arrangements, and promise easier access to work and income. However, the particular nature of platforms and their demands on platform workers have come at the cost of workers' increased precarity, the remaining sections will show.

2.2 Perils and precarity of platform work

Despite the purported benefits of platform work, reports (Mai, 2018; Bajwa et al., 2018) about the perils of such work have cast doubts on its promises. In fact, workers' experiences are mostly characterised by high levels of precarity and insecurity. Prassl (2018: 1) observed an increased tendency to view “humans as a service” in the digital era, referring to a phrase first coined by former Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos. In his book, Prassl highlighted the precarious work conditions of a growing group from mostly low-income households, performing a vast range of gig services for the skilled top earners in society. Similarly, Morel (2015) found accelerating polarisation between well-paid highly skilled workers increasing their productivity on the back of services provided by badly paid low-skilled ones. Yet, Prassl (2018: 9) even went a step further by drawing parallels between modern business practices of platforms and the exploitation of workforces during the 18th century: app-based workers would toil for platform capitalists, often located in the Global North and concentrating value extracted by workers around the globe. His argument might constitute an extreme comparison with the historical struggles between workers and capitalists, still it points to the consequences of platforms' key features on workers' precarity, as argued next.

2.2.1 Four elements of platform workers' precarity

Precarious work conditions are not a new phenomenon per se, as the ILO (2018) emphasised: although “digital labour platforms are a product of technological advances, work on these platforms resembles many long-standing work arrangements” (ibid.: xv). For instance, underemployment has been a widespread feature of labour markets in the forms of temporary work or project-based jobs (Gutierrez-Barbarrusa, 2016: 485). Moreover, precarity is not limited to poorly paid jobs (Ross, 2008: 41) and hence need not be associated with poverty or deprivation. However, the nature of platforms – both in the reliance on digital tools as well as the business model based on independent contractors – adds further aspects to platform workers' precarity. In the literature, four elements can be identified which capture that precarity, and the contributions of platforms to it, particularly clearly: low, irregular pay; the opacity of algorithmic management; health and safety risks; and the lack of social protection. These resemble Kim et al.'s (2011: 100) “four dimensions of precariousness”

(continuity, vulnerability, protection, and income) but are adjusted to geographically tethered, app-based work. Each of the elements shall now be considered in turn.

2.2.1.1 Low, irregular pay

Platform workers are paid by the number of gigs they execute, or sometimes by the distance they cover: “they are only paid for that productive moment” (Woodcock et al., 2020: n.p.). They do not receive an hourly wage, though there are few exceptions, such as the platform Just Eat. One important component of irregular pay is the issue of unpaid labour. Hooker et al. (2022: 15) observed that waiting time between gigs could result in many hours without pay when the worker is unable to engage in alternative activities, and it represented “a major source of frustration” among workers. In addition, platforms shift costs on to workers. These are both fixed costs, including the necessary equipment (Vallas, 2018: 49), as well as costs “normally associated with employment” (Warhurst et al., 2017: 1), for instance injury insurance or pension contributions. Considering that the need for additional income is a major motivation for individuals to turn to app-based work (Forrester, 2019), Bessa et al.’s (2022: 6) finding that irregular pay presents the main explanation for platform workers’ protests – “by some distance and in all regions of the globe” – appears reasonable. Irregular pay instead of an hourly wage and platforms’ avoidance of costs are also connected to workers’ classification as independent contractors by platforms. This status as de jure self-employed has consequences for their entitlement to social benefits, as explored next.

2.2.1.2 Lack of social protection

Most app-based workers suffer from “social protection gaps” (Hooker et al., 2022: 9). The lack of holiday and sick pay or unemployment insurance has been attributed to workers’ misclassification as self-employed. This allows platforms to avoid the payment of pension, insurance, or social security contributions, and has been said to form the bedrock of platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017). In many cases, workers who do receive welfare benefits only do so because they additionally engage in formal employment (European Parliament, 2017: 13; International Labour Organization, 2018: xviii). The absence of such benefits is especially concerning in welfare states without universal access, for instance to healthcare. Studying app-based work in the US, Bajwa et al. (2018: 1) noted that “the lack of comprehensive

access to universal health coverage and social benefits compounds the deleterious effects of precarious work”. Yet, considering the extent to which workers depend on platforms to engage in platform work and to which platforms control crucial aspects of app-based work, many scholars (Bajwa et al., 2018; Palier, 2019; Esbenshade et al., 2019; Woodcock et al., 2020) as well as research institutes (California Future of Work Commission, 2021) and international organisations (European Parliament, 2017; International Labour Organization, 2018) argued that the relationship between platforms and app-based workers should be classified as employment. Consequently, workers would be entitled to related social benefits.

Misclassification indeed constitutes a main pillar of resistance to platforms by governments and app-based workers alike. Some governments have taken measures to address the issue and hence support workers, for example California’s state government through Assembly Bill 5. Similarly, proposals surrounding an EU-wide platform work directive aim to change the classification as self-employed independent contractors (Hooker et al., 2022). App-based workers, often supported by traditional unions, have initiated court cases against platforms to prove misclassification and earn access to social benefits, as elaborated later. However, it should be noted that changing workers’ employment status might not suffice to fully mitigate their precarity. Other elements of precarity would still go unaddressed, including the following two.

2.2.1.3 *Opacity of algorithmic management*

The digital nature of platform work and its reliance on technology to manage workers and connect them with customers and businesses create information asymmetries (Bajwa et al., 2018: 1; Wilkinson et al., 2022: 6). In other words, workers have no oversight or influence over the processes inside platforms that affect their earnings or working conditions. Woodcock (2022: 6) identified three “algorithmic systems of control” facilitated by digitalisation and operated by platforms: “direction”, “evaluation”, and “discipline”. First, direction refers to the instructions given by platforms to workers via mobile apps on where and when to execute an order. Second, evaluation occurs through automated means and is influenced by reviews and ratings by customers. Third, discipline reflects the bonus payments that seek to push workers to engage at times of high demand for platforms, while “automated interventions” (ibid.: 6), particularly deactivations of workers’ accounts, punish

them for inactivity or negative ratings. Notably, workers have little to no insight into the processes behind these “systems of control” (ibid.: 6): the lack of collective bargaining (Hooker et al., 2022) and of the right to form a union (Wolf, 2022) leaves control over business structures and operations in the hands of platform managers. Established unions have started to organise platform workers, such as the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (Vallas, 2018: 55), and some groups of workers have formed their own collectives via social media (Chesta et al., 2019: 819). Even though these dynamics increasingly allow workers to organise, share experiences, and mobilise for protests, they still do not grant them access to information about platforms’ operations, use of algorithms, or decision-making processes.

2.2.1.4 Health and safety risks

Lastly, app-based workers’ gigs moreover expose them to health and safety risks due to the physical or offline activity they require. Contrary to crowdworkers who fulfil tasks at home or remotely, the online-to-offline business model of geographically tethered platforms can put workers at risk of injuries or violence. Ravenelle (Schor et al., 2017: 8) described instances of “physical risk” in New York, where workers “have been confronted with dangerous, illegal, or unsafe tasks or situations”, for instance when ordered by customers to transport drugs. Reports about violence or racism against workers (Bajwa et al., 2018) mirror further facets of the physical dangers encountered while engaging in app-based work. During the Covid-19 pandemic, these risks were further exacerbated by the possibility of contracting the coronavirus. In their study on platform work in San Francisco during the pandemic, Benner et al. (2020) not only found that app-based workers felt the need to fulfil more gigs due to loss of income in other jobs, but also that the major platforms did not provide sufficient protective gear to workers. Apart from physical risks, studies (Kim et al., 2011: 102; Mai, 2018) furthermore found evidence of psychological distress and other negative effects on workers’ mental health due to uncertainty about future earnings. Algorithmic management and evaluation of workers have been connected to “considerable psychosocial effects” and decreased wellbeing, too (Bajwa et al., 2018: 1).

Overall, the four elements of precarity demonstrate that platforms shift both costs and risks on to a growing group of self-employed individuals. According to the ILO (2011: 5),

precarious work is characterised precisely by that shift of “risks and responsibilities on to workers”. In the app-based work sector, precarity is the result of platforms’ reliance (and insistence) on independent contractors, the use of algorithmic tools, and the online-to-offline business model.

2.2.2 Workers versus platforms: worldwide resistance and discontent

Some scholars (Abraham et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2020: 8) noted that workers accept the precarity of platform work in return for greater flexibility than in standard employment. Moreover, workers experience precarity differently (Vallas et al., 2020), and in many countries, precarious work conditions are the norm and widespread in local labour markets (Rogan et al., 2018). Hence, the precarious elements of app-based work might not be universally perceived as problematic or in need of governmental intervention. Still, resistance against work conditions has become a global feature. On one hand, protests in cities around the world visualise both workers’ discontent as well as the precarious work conditions on platforms. Bessa et al. (2022) presented several significant findings in their ILO study on app-based workers’ protests, two of which relate to their location and timing. First, platform workers’ protests are global phenomena: while the US experiences the highest concentration, “Argentina, China, India and the United Kingdom all had over 100 [protests] between 2017 and 2020” (ibid.: 17). Second, the authors also revealed “a general increase in the volume of protest events over time” (ibid.: 16).

On the other, court cases reflect workers’ struggles to gain classification as employees instead of independent contractors to attain entitlement to employment-related social benefits. Legal proceedings against platforms are supposed to prove platforms’ control over working conditions, thus establishing an employment relationship that obliges platforms to pay respective social security contributions (Pilaar, 2018: 73). Nonetheless, court cases have been unable to address the precarity of workers. This is both due to contradictory court rulings in certain countries, for example in Italy (Cherry et al., 2017), as well as due to platforms’ reluctance to comply with legal obligations to reclassify independent contractors as employees. In Spain, for instance, platforms have reacted to the national ‘Rider Law’ establishing an employment relationship by using “non-standard employment contracts, for example temporary, part-time or agency contracts” (Hooker et al., 2022: 9) or outsourcing

workers to minimise costs (Brave New Europe, 2022). In the UK, a seemingly promising ruling by the UK Supreme Court has equally shown little effect on the conditions of most British app-based workers. While the Court obliged ride-hailing platform Uber to pay its workers the national living wage, the ruling did not establish an employment relationship between the platform and its UK-based workers, as Peiris (2021) noted in an ILO report. Furthermore, it did not apply to its delivery branch UberEats or other platforms (Peiris, 2021).

Apart from protests about work conditions and legal proceedings against platforms, some workers have tried to establish alternatives, for instance platform cooperatives where workers themselves decide collectively on work conditions: they “own and control the business together” (World Economic Forum, 2018: 12). One example is La Pájara in Madrid, which competes with established delivery platforms (Bellomo et al., 2020). Although cooperatives allow workers to address most aspects of precarity outlined above, apart from physical risks, they remain marginal phenomena in the platform economy (ibid.). Overall, platform workers’ widespread resistance against the various elements of precarity has shed a light on the business practices of platforms, but also on the urban dimension of their work, as elaborated next.

2.3 The politics of platform urbanism: cities at the centre of tensions

Even though the digital elements of platform work might suggest otherwise, its promises and perils manifest themselves visibly and physically in urban spaces. This, once more, is the result of digital labour platforms’ very nature, requiring cities’ infrastructure, workforces, and customers to operate successfully. Platforms, and platform work, are urban phenomena. For example, ride-hailing platform Uber operates in more than 900 cities worldwide (Howson et al., 2021: 640), and delivery platform Glovo deliberately refers to itself as “city-based logistics company” (Glovo, 2020: n.p.). Thus, despite platforms claiming to be solely technology providers and exempt from local regulations, they are embedded in and dependent on urban contexts. However, the dependence is not necessarily one-sided, and customers’ growing appetite for platform services have granted platforms greater political influence (Culpepper et al., 2020). City governments find themselves at the forefront of tensions between workers and platforms and have taken a wide range of

responses and approaches to the growth of app-based work, though it remains unclear what factors influence their responses.

2.3.1 Platforms as parasites in urban spaces, and limits to their “disembeddedness”

Howson et al. (2021: 634) wrote that platforms like to see themselves as “disembedded” from geographical places and their social, economic, or political contexts. For example, platforms’ argument of merely being technology companies facilitating transfers between app-based workers and customers, instead of being employers, seeks to extract value from local workers while avoiding the city-specific regulations or taxation regimes comparable companies would have to accept. The notion of disembeddedness hence mirrors platforms’ use of “regulatory arbitrage” (Prassl, 2018: 21), or attempts to evade laws and regulation. Furthermore, Caprotti et al. (2022: 4) highlighted that “technology infrastructure may be located a long distance away from the platform’s day-to-day urban application”, pointing to the disembeddedness of the hardware and software behind platforms. Nonetheless, the platforms’ business model relies on urban features to such high extent that Avermaete (2021: n.p.) called platforms’ dependence on cities “parasitic”. It might seem contradictory that proximity and urban density are still important at a time when digital tools decrease transaction costs, yet Glaeser (2012: 60) recognised this trend as “paradox of the modern metropolis”. Similarly, Coyle (1997: 194) anticipated the growing relevance of cities for economic development already in the late 1990s based on the transition towards post-industrial societies with large service economies, to which platforms contribute.

The literature on platform urbanism has described the relationship between cities and platforms in detail, though taking a broader view of the platform economy than purely platform work. Barns (2014: 1) first coined the term “platform urbanism” to highlight the intrinsic connection between city and platform. That connection stems from platforms’ need for density and proximity of consumers and workers, or what Davidson et al. (2016: 218) called “distinctly urban conditions”. In other words, platforms rely on “network effects” (McAfee et al., 2017: 201; Srnicek, 2017a: 256), and these can be best realised in dense, urban areas. Platforms need large concentrations of customers to be viable and ultimately profitable, though Srnicek (2017a: 256) also emphasised that few platforms actually are,

mostly due to platforms subsidising their own services to crowd out competitors. Caprotti et al. (2022: 10) offered a typology of four types of platform applications in cities to demonstrate how “platform urbanism is expressed and operationalized in different urban spheres”. The first two types, “Online-to-offline producer-consumer intermediation” and “Service provider-customer intermediation”, capture the dependence of platforms on urban spaces most aptly: “the city is key because of the spatial economy of urban aggregation and density that makes online-to-offline producer-consumer intermediation function from a commercial and user perspective” (ibid.: 9). Hence, network effects and cities are central to the realisation of “platform capitalism” (Srnicsek, 2017a).

The reliance of platforms on cities is not entirely one-sided, however. Culpepper et al. (2020) observed that the rise of platform services and platform work has benefitted from the widespread support of consumers. Subsequently, consumers have become an important source of platforms’ political influence, referred to by the authors as “platform power” (ibid.: 288), since consumers’ use of platforms could be argued to demonstrate platforms’ value for urban societies. Hence, platform power consists of “the tacit allegiance of consumers, who can prove a formidable source of opposition to regulations that threaten these platforms” (ibid.: 288). Although Culpepper et al. conceptualised the term platform very broadly and included a wide range of companies from Amazon to Uber, their argument holds relevance for digital labour platforms, too. Some of them, including Deliveroo, have warned of negative consequences to customers in case of tighter regulation as well, for example by threatening to exit certain urban markets if opposed by the respective municipal authorities (Financial Times, 2021).

Culpepper et al.’s (2020) argument moreover supported the view that platforms do not merely “position themselves as neutral facilitators of social interaction [and] digital commerce” (Leszczynski, 2019: 4). Platforms and their managers or representatives have become crucial actors in debates surrounding the political and regulatory future of platform work, who attempt to influence policy processes in their favour. The most prominent example from recent months has been the revelation from the so-called “Uber Files” (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, 2022), in which former Uber managers described the company’s lobbying efforts on various governmental levels to create the most favourable regulatory environment. Cities have not been spared from the presence

of those efforts, and platform managers have been found to be seeking influence in municipal politics, for instance by financially supporting mayoral campaigns in the US (McNeill, 2016: 495). These reports explain why Sadowski (2020: 1) took a particularly critical view of platform urbanism and argued that platforms “attempt to snatch sovereignty away” from governments by combining lobbying with attempts at pushing competitors out of urban markets. While Sadowski provided a more theoretical account of how platforms attempt to undermine municipal sovereignty, Wolf (2022: 2) offered empirical evidence from the US to demonstrate how platform managers intentionally lobby higher governmental levels “to legalize their business model”. Managers thus aim to pre-empt potential regulation or intervention by municipal authorities and spread their operations across various cities within a given territory more easily. The last section will point to the reactions and responses of city governments in the face of expanding platforms and platform work.

2.3.2 Local context and the various responses of municipalities

As argued above, even if platforms might prefer to consider themselves disembedded from local contexts, the requirements of their business model do not allow them to. In fact, the context of the cities in which platforms and their workers operate seems to matter heavily. Context – such as the interplay of potential national regulation of platform work, the views of local workers’ representatives, and municipal policy priorities – appears to influence why platforms can operate more freely, with less public intervention, in some places than in others. Different contexts produce different conditions, or obstacles, to platforms’ attempts at rolling out their services across different cities around the world. This constituted a significant finding in a study by Courmont (2018: 20). He argued that understanding the governmental reactions to digital trends, including the rise of platforms, requires an analysis set within the specific local contexts and institutional dynamics in which these trends manifest themselves (“« en contexte » au coeur des dynamiques institutionnelles [...] propres à chaque territoire”).

In fact, the emergence of platforms and platform work in cities evokes a wide range of reactions and regulations from municipal governments. Examples from studies undertaken in the US underline the variety of approaches taken. For instance, the advent of Uber prompted the city government of Austin to heavily intervene in its operation by demanding

permits, the payment of annual fees, a limit on driver hours, and special pick-up zones (Pilaar, 2018: 79). In contrast, the municipality of Washington D.C. adopted an entirely free-market approach to ride-hailing platforms (Davidson et al., 2016: 249). Municipal authorities in some European cities, including London, have completely banned certain platforms, even if only temporarily (Reuters, 2022). Hence, city governments have made use of a wide spectrum of possible interventions, ranging from the outright ban and partly regulation to an entirely *laissez-faire* approach.

However, there is little understanding of the influences that shape the responses of city governments. Theoretical accounts are particularly underdeveloped regarding the municipal management of platform *work*, compared to their management or governance of platforms more broadly. Considering the ongoing precarity of platform workers, and the growth of workers' protests around the world (Bessa et al., 2022), an analysis of the factors that favour or hinder different municipal responses seems highly pertinent. Hence, the following chapter will discuss how earlier studies have explained the variations in governmental and municipal responses to platform work as well as which knowledge gaps remain to be bridged. Notably, it will alert to the need to account for the interplay of governmental hierarchies, influence of non-state actors, and municipal officials' perception of app-based work when analysing the influences behind those responses.

2.4 Conclusion

Precarious work conditions and urban features are foundational components of platforms' DNA. Platforms reflect a broader, long-term trend towards flexible and digitally mediated work arrangements. Still, the discussion of the existing literature has underlined that their business model – relying both on the use of independent contractors and cities' network effects – holds consequences for workers' welfare and urban politics. On one hand, platforms are considered to perpetuate precarity and insecurity in labour markets due to irregular pay (Woodcock et al., 2020), lack of social protection (Srnicek, 2017; Hooker et al., 2022), algorithmic management (Woodcock, 2022), and safety risks (Schor et al., 2017; Bajwa et al., 2018). On the other, their representatives have been found to lobby policymakers on various governmental levels, including municipal governments (McNeill, 2016; Wolf, 2022), and engage in regulatory arbitrage (Prassl, 2018). These factors, in turn, put cities at

the forefront of tensions emanating from the platform economy and raise questions about municipalities' ability to manage the growth of app-based work.

By zooming in on the conceptual literature on platform work governance and its methodological and theoretical underpinnings, the next chapter will focus the literature review further: it will delve into the knowledge gaps surrounding the reasons for why municipal governments respond to, or govern, platform work differently. Informed by insightful studies adopting governance approaches to the study of platform regulation in cities, it will moreover mobilise and operationalise the concept of multi-level governance to capture the influences behind municipalities' responses. Due to their intrinsic connection to cities, the remainder of the thesis will focus on geographically tethered platforms, in contrast to crowdwork ones.

3. Conceptualising municipal responses to platform work through multi-level governance

Following the preceding literature review on platform urbanism and the tensions created by platform work in cities, this chapter will discuss the literature on platform regulation and governance. Moreover, it will underline the remaining gaps in the analysis of municipal responses to platform work. The chapter is structured in two parts. In Section 3.1, it will discuss the literature on the regulation of app-based work with a traditional national lens (Thelen, 2018), predominantly concerned with implications for social security and employment law (Lobel, 2017; Pilaar, 2018), and consider insightful studies on the municipal level (Aguilera et al., 2019; Vith et al., 2019). It will argue that the common emphasis on categorising urban-level regulation or governance modes, instead of categorising the influences behind municipal responses, comes at the cost of explanatory power. This emphasis, in turn, creates the need for an analytical framework that provides a more holistic picture of why city governments respond to platform work in particular ways. Compared to approaches taken by previous studies (Morell, 2018; Voytenko Palgan et al., 2021), such framework requires a focus that is both narrower and wider, concentrating on platform work instead of the entire platform economy, while shedding light on more types of platform work and a greater range of possible municipal actions than legislation. Section 3.2 will then justify the use of multi-level governance (MLG) to meet these requirements: it will consider how the concept should be understood, modified, and operationalised to support research on the influences behind municipal responses to app-based work. Later, the thesis will apply the modified MLG framework, and its novel operationalisation through four indicators proposed here, to the cases of San Francisco, Milan, and Madrid.

3.1 Regulatory responses to platform work

3.1.1 Research adopting a national lens

The increasingly widespread phenomenon of platform work across the globe, and the comparable challenges it creates, have led researchers to examine responses of policymakers at various geographical scales. Apart from studies (Prassl, 2018; Sadowski, 2020) that investigate the consequences of platforms on work and welfare on a higher meta level, as

outlined in Chapter 2, some have for example asked how supranational authorities, including the EU Commission, could intervene and regulate app-based work in EU member states (Vallas, 2018; Petropoulos et al., 2019; Hooker et al., 2022). Yet, academic studies on public regulation of platform work often give precedence to analyses of nation-wide regulation, due to the view that the key to improving the working conditions of platform workers lies in labour and social security law, commonly a realm of national competence. The “misclassification” of workers as independent contractors, depriving them of employment-related rights and benefits (Bajwa et al., 2018: 1; Esbenshade et al., 2019: 193), is a case in point. Empirically, it indeed is reasonable to examine national regulatory responses to determine the rights of platform workers, as some countries, for example Spain, have passed nation-wide legislation putting employees and app-based workers on par and have hence sought to create welfare entitlements for the latter group. Lobel (2017), for instance, explored which effects the platform economy would have on employment law. Similarly, Stewart et al. (2017) addressed the case of Australia and asked to what extent existing laws would be applicable to platform work. Going a step further, Pilaar (2018) drew on welfare regime types and employed a cross-national approach to predict how French and American legal systems would respectively safeguard the rights of a growing group of app-based workers.

However, not all research concerned with the national level is necessarily of legal nature. Borrowing the concept of “grey zone” from geopolitics, Dieuaide et al. (2020) assessed the impact of platform work on employment relationships, showing the growing importance of “worker-platform-customer” (ibid.: 1) relationships in the platform economy. Meanwhile, Thelen’s (2018) investigation of diverging regulatory outcomes in Germany, Sweden, and the US, building on a comparative politics approach, has become a point of reference for scholars of platform regulation. Her finding that the mobilisation of “different coalitional alignments” (ibid.: 939), or the coordination among interest groups, influenced reception and perception of the ride-hailing platform Uber in each country has informed other studies with more specific geographical focus (Vith et al., 2019; Aguilera et al., 2019). Thelen’s (2018) analysis moreover revealed that that comparable stakeholders do not necessarily hold the same interests across different locations, alerting to the need for careful examination of local actors and their motives. Still, the concentration of platform workers in metropolitan areas (Artioli, 2018) and the subsequent challenges posed to respective governmental authorities warrant a city-level approach to the study of regulatory responses. They also

make an investigation of potential support mechanisms by municipalities for platform workers particularly worthwhile. The following paragraphs will showcase the insights generated by previous research centred on the urban, municipal level and highlight the gaps which remain to be addressed.

3.1.2 Urban and municipal considerations in the platform regulation literature

As the preceding chapter already indicated, the connection between platforms, platform work, and urban areas is by now widely recognised, particularly by proponents of platform urbanism (Barns, 2014; Sadowski, 2020). In that tradition, a growing number of academic articles investigate how platform work is treated by different city governments. Some studies have taken an in-depth approach, discussing single cases and identifying unique local circumstances that gave rise to specific regulatory responses. Employing a socio-legal approach that combines the study of pieces of legislation and the involvement of an “increasing number of social actors”, Zanatta et al. (2018: 2), for example, traced the response to Uber’s arrival by Sao Paulo’s city government and stressed the political struggles shaping regulatory action in the Brazilian metropolis. They observed the progressive mobilisation of legal instruments by various governmental and non-state stakeholders to limit Uber’s presence. Similar research projects in North America have unveiled the potential steering power of municipal officials by concentrating on the tensions and interests within city governments: Brail (2018) found that Toronto’s municipality acted on grounds of promoting innovation, while Flores et al. (2017) explained the approach of San Francisco’s City Hall to ride-hailing services as result of single political actors in favour of such platform services. Reilly et al. (2019) took an entirely different approach and drew on Heeks’ decent work standard to assess precarity among Uber drivers in Cali, Colombia, which in turn aimed to inform policymaking. Despite producing interesting findings, these articles did not necessarily reflect the full range of municipal responses to platform work, and the factors driving their choice, because they did not focus on non-legislative measures or “soft” policy instruments (Majoor et al., 2015: 114), such as the use of agreements, incentives, or negotiation. Moreover, greater attention could be paid to the role of a wider variety of local stakeholders in debates surrounding platform work and national institutional contexts. Above all, analytical frameworks remain to be proposed which could allow for replicable – and potentially comparable – research on other cities.

Meanwhile, other studies have taken a comparative view by analysing several cities contemporaneously, with greater emphasis on metropolitan areas in the Global North. For example, Aguilera et al.'s (2019) widely cited study of municipal regulation of short-term rental platforms in Barcelona, Milan, and Paris – which formed the basis for Colomb et al.'s (2021; 2023) analysis of the topic in twelve European cities – adopted a sociological approach to public policy analysis. It unveiled how “social struggles” (Aguilera et al., 2019: 1692) and local alliances of stakeholders make platforms a “political issue” (ibid.: 1693) requiring government intervention. However, similar to Ardura Urquiaga et al.'s (2019) legal analysis and quantitative evaluation of rental app regulation in Barcelona and Madrid it did not emphasise the issue of platform work. In contrast, Beer et al. (2017) and Wolf (2022) both focused on the regulatory reception of ride-hailing platforms in US cities, employing “qualitative comparison” (Beer et al., 2017: 84) and “multivariate modeling” (Wolf, 2022: 1) respectively, yet did not address the factors determining different urban approaches. In a similar vein as Bond (2015), who studied the regulation in three US cities through a legal lens, Beer et al. (2017) offered a useful categorisation of municipal responses based on an analysis of regulatory measures, whereas Wolf (2022) argued that cities which historically have stronger regulation tend to adopt stricter approaches to platforms. Still, neither of the two focused on local socio-political factors that shape those approaches. Applying agglomeration economics to another group of US cities, Rauch et al. (2015: 1) attempted to predict likely “regulatory strategies” of municipalities based on assumed economic rationales of efficiency and cost-saving in city administrations, though their article did not shed light on underlying political determinants stressed by Thelen (2018) either. Studying responses in three Canadian cities through a governance approach, Tabascio et al. (2021) unveiled the important interplay between regional and metropolitan governments explaining why Toronto's municipality regards ride-hailing platforms a municipal responsibility in contrast to Vancouver and Montreal. It would have been interesting, though, to complement the governance framework with an analysis of the potential influence of local non-state actors on each city government.

Other research projects (Morell, 2018; Vith et al., 2019; Voytenko Palgan et al., 2021) adopted a similar governance focus as Tabascio et al. (2021). Voytenko Palgan et al.'s (2021) paper on the municipal governance of the sharing economy in European and North American cities deserves special attention for the analytical framework it proposed. Building on empirical evidence from seven cities, it identified five mechanisms through which

municipalities govern the sharing economy. However, the authors emphasised the normative aspect of their research, seeking to offer municipal policymakers a range of roles they can exercise instead of explaining local factors that determined different urban responses: “[the framework] may be applied and adjusted in any urban context where [sharing economy organisations] are present” (ibid.: 2). Moreover, their broad focus on the sharing economy, which went beyond platform work and the platform economy, has left nuances between reactions to different types of platforms and app-based work to be explored. Such broad focus made Vith et al.’s (2019) research on urban responses to the sharing economy in 16 “leading global cities” (ibid.: 1023) less suited for understanding platform work in cities as well, although their investigation suggested that the framing of platforms – as proposed by Thelen (2018) for the national level – also seemed to be decisive for regulation on urban level. Vidal et al. in Morell (2018) adopted a similar approach to Vith et al. (2019) by classifying municipal governance modes of the sharing economy in four categories (the city government as ‘monitor’, ‘regulator’, ‘promotor’, and ‘collaborator’) but chose to focus on a descriptive rather than analytical account of how city governments employ different strategies instead of why. The great value of these studies – from Tabascio et al. to Vidal et al. – consisted of their focus on *governance* rather than solely *regulation*, giving more weight to the roles of municipalities as monitors or enablers of platform work. As Da Cruz et al. (2018) pointed out, the increasing number and diversity of actors involved in policymaking processes, in addition to a growing expectation of cities to be more self-reliant, justifies more thorough examinations of governance structures, how municipalities manage the expansion of actors and responsibilities, and to what effect.

3.1.3 Bridging the knowledge gaps

Thus, despite the important insights generated through a focus on governance, significant knowledge gaps regarding municipal responses to the growth of app-based work remain. Previous articles very competently answer questions of ‘what?’ and ‘how?’, proposing useful classifications of municipal governance types, but rarely of ‘why?’. In fact, the tendency towards categorisation is not a weakness per se, but *what* is being categorised: instead of classifying responses, one should study their determinants or influences. Furthermore, whenever studies do address explanatory factors, they often do so focussing on the sharing economy too broadly or outside any replicable framework that can enlighten the various potential drivers of responses to growing groups of platform workers in other

cities. The ideal analytical framework hence needs to be able to account for city-specific social and political factors influencing municipal responses, following Thelen (2018) and earlier policy analysis theory stressing the role of agency in policymaking processes (Marinetto, 1999). Pressure from non-state actors on various governmental levels can matter as much as competences and available policy instruments.

At the same time, the framework needs to adopt a focus on platform work which is both narrower and wider than previous studies: on one hand being more limited than an analysis of the sharing economy, yet, on the other, going beyond the common focus on ride-hailing drivers to include delivery workers and less visible platform workers, such as those in domestic services. Put differently, the framework should account for more types of app-based work than Uber drivers, who have received ample attention in the literature, as shown above. It should also be able to capture responses that might not have been considered by purely legal research approaches in order to detect more atypical and not necessarily legislative municipal strategies, employing a governance approach that sheds light on how city governments manage local interest groups to steer the conditions of platform work. In that regard, it has yet to be examined how municipalities can support app-based workers in the context of limited competences and at times influential local stakeholders. Such examination seems especially urgent considering continuous struggles to ensure welfare entitlements for app-based workers and the global rise in platform workers' protests (Bessa et al., 2022). The remaining sections will demonstrate how a focus on governance, and especially multi-level governance, can meet these requirements and offer a systematic framework to understand – instead of simply categorising – municipal responses to platform work, though requiring some modifications to fulfil its analytical potential.

3.2 The analytical value of urban governance and multi-level governance

Over the past two decades, urban governance emerged as key concept for studying how city governments manage “the process of coordinating political decision making” through an appreciation of “structural, cultural, and agency” factors (DiGaetano et al., 2003: 373). These factors are said to capture “participants, objectives, instruments, and outcomes” of governance processes (Pierre, 1999: 372). As globalisation and the devolution of competences has not only created new challenges for municipalities but also increased

pressures to involve non-state actors – “corporations, NGOs and civil society organizations” – in policymaking (Gupta et al., 2015: 15), the concept helps to shed light on the mechanisms through which city governments deal with such pressures. Researchers employing urban governance analysis have put particular emphasis on the interaction of city officials with various stakeholders, thus refining and going beyond urban regime theory, which they criticise as too US-centric and concerned about political economy (Gissendanner, 2003; Pierre, 2005). Through comparative urban governance analysis, some authors have attempted to hone the framework to enlighten which values or structures determine the interaction with stakeholders: DiGaetano et al. (2003: 359), for example, demonstrated how comparative urban governance can not only explain variation among cities but offer greater insight into each city in question, revealing different “modes of urban governance”.

Though recognising the interdependence between urban and higher governmental or jurisdictional levels (Da Cruz et al., 2018: 22), urban governance does not capture it as comprehensively as multi-level governance (MLG). Accounting for that interdependence appears particularly pertinent regarding responses to app-based work because actions, or city governments’ expectations of actions, by national governments or even supranational entities in the EU’s case could influence the strategy adopted by municipalities. As Colomb et al. (2021: 38) observed, various governmental levels within the same country might develop their own regulatory responses to the platform economy, which might clash with the objectives and priorities of other levels. Resolving the misclassification of app-based workers as independent contractors, for example, requires changes of national labour laws, which in turn might inform how city governments adjust their responses. For the case of Madrid (Chapter 7), where the Spanish government has introduced a ‘Rider Law’, this will represent a significant explanation for the lack of urgency among municipal officials. Similarly, the approach to platform work by San Francisco’s City Hall (Chapter 5) has been influenced by the outcome of California’s Assembly Bill 5, seeking to classify independent contractors as employees. Meanwhile, Milan’s municipality (Chapter 6) will have to adjust its response to the outcomes of negotiations between workers, platforms, and the Ministry of Labour conducted at national level. Moreover, and as will be demonstrated below, the relative priority assigned by city officials to platform work, and their perception thereof, can present an important influence, and the “cultural” element of DiGaetano et al.’s (2003: 359) conceptualisation of urban governance does not offer an adequate lens to capture it. For these

reasons, MLG offers a more adequate analytical framework, even if it requires modifications, as the remaining paragraphs will elaborate.

3.2.1 Multi-level governance in “complex polities”

The term multi-level governance (MLG) was first coined by Marks (1993: 392) in relation to European Union studies and defined as “a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers”. Bache et al. (2004: 3) refined that definition and clarified that *multi-level* refers to the “interdependence of governments operating at different territorial levels”, while *governance* points to the “growing interdependence between governments and non-governmental actors”. MLG thus goes beyond intergovernmental relations, that can be captured by federalism or regionalism (Piattoni in Ongaro, 2015: 325), but crucially “needs to also factor in the participation of non-governmental actors” (ibid.: 326).

In other words, MLG can act as “framework for interpreting governance in complex polities” (Ongaro, 2015: 2), where complexity refers to the presence of various, at times competing interests as well as limited legislative or regulatory competences. To exercise that analytical function, MLG has been widely conceptualised along two axes, a vertical and a horizontal one. Thus conceptualised, the framework accounts for the distribution of government authority or competences vertically to state actors on other territorial levels, as well as horizontally to non-state actors (Bache et al., 2004). First, the vertical level addresses the interdependence between governmental or jurisdictional levels. Such multi-layer interaction need not be strictly formalised (Bache et al., 2004) and can emerge *ad hoc*, a view supported by Piattoni: formal “institutional or constitutional” (Piattoni in Ongaro, 2015: 331) settings pose no prerequisite for interaction among various governmental instances. Second, concerning the horizontal level, MLG points to the potential myriad of interest groups seeking to influence policymaking, requiring “coordination” (Cucca et al., 2021: 1) by governmental actors.

However, the conceptualisation of MLG along axes can convey a misleading, simplistic image about the complex policy processes it tries to capture. On one hand, non-state actors

need not be confined to a single horizontal level. Such multi-level interaction can be the product of necessity when officials of one governmental level are unwilling to reciprocate interest groups' willingness to engage, leading the latter to resort to another level, or it can be deliberate. For example, evidence from the US gathered by Wolf (2022) demonstrated that platform representatives deliberately seek to influence higher levels in order to lobby national legislation and pre-empt regulation by cities. This finding underlines the governance challenge of platform work and the tensions between platforms' urban embeddedness and disembeddedness (Howson et al., 2021: 634) discussed in Section 2.3.1. While the physical elements of such work are inherently urban – including infrastructure, customers, and workers but also protests – its roots and influences (both in regulatory and ideological terms) are much more geographically dispersed. Conceptualising the role of non-state actors through the horizontal axis should therefore not create an illusion of equally powerful stakeholders located on a single governmental level.

On the other hand, adopting the vertical axis can equally misrepresent the formal and informal relationship between governmental levels. As mentioned above, the relationship is not necessarily hierarchically structured but can take more interdependent or even independent forms (Bache et al., 2004). Previous research suggested that city governments can address issues relating to the platform economy independently (Flores et al., 2017) or in coordination with other governmental levels (Tabascio et al., 2021). Empirical examples, for instance the case of Uber in London (Reuters, 2022), demonstrate the success of some municipalities in going further than higher administrative levels concerning the regulation of digital labour platforms. Those city governments have done so despite the formal distribution of competences which technically grants their national governments more extensive legislative powers. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to outright reject the conceptualisation of MLG through axes, because they do hold analytical value. For instance, the vertical axis offers a point of entry into understanding the roles of different governmental levels. Thus, this analysis will continue to refer to both axes, even if purely for illustrative purposes to distinguish between the influences of state and non-state actors on municipal policy, as well as to avoid confusion with other scholars referring to the two axes. Their use shall not imply either a horizontal axis consisting of equally influential non-state actors intervening on the same governmental level, nor a purely hierarchical vertical axis.

Despite MLG's existence for roughly three decades, the concept still faces critical voices that question its analytical value. Responding to the charge that MLG would be purely descriptive, Ongaro (2015: 3) argued that the concept should be combined with other "streams of research" to increase its explanatory potential: for example, combining it with policy analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of policymaking processes in complex polities. Moreover, Piattoni (2010) – one of MLG's most fervent advocates in the academic literature – has shown how MLG can be both a descriptive as well as theoretical concept, refuting the claim that it purely serves summarising or categorising purposes. In Piattoni's (Ongaro, 2015) view, the framework does provide a descriptive reflection of the "blurring of the paradigmatic [...] distinction between state and society" (ibid.: 337). Yet, it also captures the underlying dynamics that give rise to specific policy outcomes, above all the influence of non-governmental actors on governance processes and ultimately on a polity, as well as the constraints of limited competences. MLG thus can help identify the limits and influences on policymakers embedded in a complex multi-level, multi-stakeholder environment. Its value when applied to urban contexts will be addressed next.

3.2.2 Making sense of urban contexts through multi-level governance

As Bramwell (2020: 15) observed, cities operate in a "multilevel context", within which municipal governments have to navigate the pressures described above. Considering the absence of a distinct urban policy analysis framework, Kaufmann et al. (2020: 4) argued that MLG – not simply urban governance – should be part of any study of urban policy. This is because municipal policymakers act at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal axis, in Kaufmann et al.'s (2020) view, and the outcome is contingent on the characteristics and officials' management of these axes. On one side, city officials' scope for formulating regulatory responses is shaped by formal and informal institutional constraints (such as competences and norms, respectively), while on the other, local non-state actors – from the local electorate generally to more defined interest groups specifically – demand that their views be reflected in municipal policies. For example, applying MLG to the study of city leadership in Italy and the UK, Budd et al. (2016: 133) showed how civic organisations and businesses, apart from city officials, all potentially shape the public debate on urban policy issues on the horizontal level. In the case of platform work, such influential actors are workers themselves, especially when organised into collectives or represented by traditional trade unions, platform companies and their interest groups, and business communities.

The composition or shape of both vertical and horizontal axis hence differs between cases and according to the policy issue at hand: some municipalities act within a hierarchy of governmental levels which grant them greater or fewer competences (Bache et al., 2004: 199), or within an environment of stronger or weaker presence of local stakeholders, which set the limits to city governments' scope for action. In Italy, for example, (directly elected) mayors traditionally hold more extensive powers pertaining to local issues than their counterparts in other European countries, while local representatives of trade unions are influential actors in urban policy processes (Budd et al., 2016). Therefore, compared to the frameworks adopted by earlier studies on municipal regulatory responses, MLG's greatest asset consists of highlighting the relevance of both agency and structure, or the influence of actors and institutions, respectively. It has already been shown in Section 3.1 how not only the distribution of competences but also the presence of local non-state actors and their role in forming ad-hoc alliances can be decisive in shaping a municipality's stance on platform work. MLG helps to unveil those influences, yet acquiring a comprehensive picture of how city governments steer platform work demands further adjustments to the analytical framework, as argued in the following.

3.2.3 Modifying multi-level governance to account for perception of platform work

Despite the usefulness of MLG for understanding the influences on urban policy, accounting for responses to platform work also requires an appreciation of municipal perceptions and priorities, and the reasons for engagement in debates regarding app-based work. These are different to DiGaetano et al.'s (2003: 373) third, "cultural" element of urban governance alluding to norms and beliefs, and instead touch upon the perception by officials. That perception itself could be influenced by the vertical axis (if another governmental level is understood to address challenges related to platform work) or horizontal axis (if an interest group successfully promotes its framing of platform work). However, MLG as commonly conceptualised (Piattoni, 2010; Ongaro, 2015) fails to account for them. Previous studies by Brail (2018) and Ardura Urquiaga et al. (2019) similarly pointed to the significance of municipal perceptions and priorities in managing app-based work, yet it remains to be investigated how these priorities interact with the interests of non-state actors and can be realised within limited competences.

In other words, earlier studies (Brail, 2018; Ardura Urquiaga et al., 2019) suggested that city governments do not merely exercise the competences granted to them and automatically react to the framing of platform work by non-state stakeholders. Instead, they are more autonomous in choosing their reaction to and regulation of app-based work. The modification therefore sheds light on municipal motivations vis-à-vis platform work: whether officials perceive it as urgent challenge requiring municipal action, as opportunity, or as means to an end – helping promote innovation and economic activity, for example. Put differently, the modified MLG framework should ensure that municipalities are not treated as passive entities but as active agents pursuing their own aims and interests within local debates surrounding platform work. City officials are agents with greater choice over whether to engage in platform work debates than the literature has so far suggested. The proposed modifications do not invalidate earlier findings on platform regulation but complement them, providing a more comprehensive account of why policymakers in a city government respond to app-based work in specific ways.

3.2.4 A novel operationalisation of multi-level governance via four indicators

Following the conceptualisation of MLG, the final step in mobilising the framework consists of its operationalisation by turning the concept into indicators that can be measured or observed (Seeber, 2020). In this study, the indicators are not easily measurable, also because some of them are contingent on each other. Hence, qualitative methods are required to assess their influence on the policy outcome – Chapter 4 will elaborate on the need for a qualitative inquiry. Previous sections have shown that MLG captures how a policy outcome is influenced by specific “configurations” (Piattoni in Ongaro, 2015: 322) or arrangements of actors on various governmental levels, and by particular institutional constraints. By raising a set of questions, indicators capture the specific MLG arrangement in a case and therefore help understand the context in which a municipal response emerges: they help “contextualise empirical observations” (Martinez in Allen, 2017: n.p.). Accordingly, and informed by the preceding sections, this thesis proposes a novel operationalisation of MLG via four original indicators. These indicators are: 1. roles, views, and involvement of non-state actors; 2. the relationship between governmental levels regarding platform work; 3. the availability of competences and instruments on municipal level; and 4. the involvement of the municipality in the policy debate on platform work.

The first indicator reflects which non-state actors seek to be involved in respective policy processes, which tools they employ, which governmental level they try to engage with, and to what effect. Previous research demonstrated not only how such stakeholders, and the alliances they create, can influence municipal policy (Zanatta et al., 2018; Aguilera et al., 2019), but also that seemingly comparable non-state actors, for example unions, can pursue diverging interests (Thelen, 2018) in different cities. Furthermore, a crucial aspect of these actors is their interaction with governmental authorities on other levels, and the reasons for such, which can be expected to be contingent on the following indicator, namely the governmental level where platform work is predominantly addressed.

Second, observing the relationship between governmental levels regarding app-based work should indicate where the main regulatory response to the phenomenon takes place. It should also enlighten whether there is some agreement between the levels – municipal, regional, national, supranational – about which one or ones should be responsible for tackling the issue. Tabascio et al. (2021) underlined the distribution of responsibilities as potential explanation for the measures taken by municipalities. As Bache et al. (2004) and Piattoni (Ongaro, 2015) argued, the relationship need not be formalised: there could be tacit agreement, or an expectation by the city government that the national government, through appropriate legislation, resolves the tensions surrounding platform workers. Hence, the relationship could be characterised by interdependence, independence, or hierarchy (Bache et al., 2004).

Third, focusing on the availability of relevant competences – including legislative, regulatory, or administrative competences pertaining to platform work – and instruments on municipal level should reflect the formal constraints that the city government needs to navigate. The indicator also alerts to whether the municipality circumvents a lack of legislative competences and inability to obtain information from platforms through soft or atypical policy tools, or “imperfect, ‘DIY’ methods” in Colomb et al.’s (2023: 1) words. These could include the use of incentives, negotiation, or mediation between workers and platforms. Accordingly, the indicator enlightens in which role or capacity a municipality interacts with other state and non-state actors, for instance in the roles of enabler or mediator, as highlighted by Vith et al. (2019). It should also identify which city office or officials act

on the municipality's behalf and determine the choice of instruments for governing platform work.

Table 2: Questions arising from the four multi-level governance indicators.

Multi-level governance indicator	Questions
<i>1. Roles, views, and involvement of non-state actors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which non-state actors seek to influence the governance of platform work in a city? ▪ On which governmental level do they engage? ▪ What are their views, and through which mechanisms do they try to have their views heard by policymakers?
<i>2. The relationship between governmental levels regarding platform work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which roles do different governmental levels take in governing platform work? ▪ How are responsibilities distributed among the various levels? ▪ Is there disagreement between officials on the levels over how the issue should be governed?
<i>3. The availability of competences and instruments on municipal level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which municipal departments or officials take key roles in the governance of platform work? ▪ What types of competences and policy instruments do they hold to respond to the growth of platform work and the tensions between workers and platforms? ▪ In what capacity does the municipality engage with state and non-state actors?
<i>4. The involvement of the municipality in the policy debate on platform work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do municipal officials perceive platform work? ▪ What priority do they assign to the issue compared to other policy challenges? ▪ Is there disagreement among officials over the role the municipality should take in related debates, and why? ▪ Does such disagreement affect the municipal response to platform work?

Fourth, and related to the modification of MLG suggested in Section 3.2.3, observing the involvement of the city government, or its key officials, in the policy debate on app-based work points to the reasons for why it chooses or refuses to engage with the issue. Earlier studies (Brail, 2018; Ardura Urquiaga et al., 2019) highlighted the role of municipal officials' opinions in deciding how to address platform work. This indicator hence sheds light on the policy priorities of the municipality in question and whether platform work is

considered a concern. Such focus, in turn, can unveil why a city administration is more engaged in the subject than others, depending on which role city officials think app-based work should play in the local economy, and which role they think the government should have in the platform economy. The indicator also raises the question of whether there are tensions or disagreement within a city government regarding its response to app-based work.

These four indicators raise different sets of questions that help investigate the empirical data and grasp the context within which a municipality responds to platform work (Table 2). Hence, using the four indicators to analyse and contextualise empirical data, MLG captures the emergence of specific MLG arrangements of actors, governmental structures, and municipal priorities. These arrangements will inform a “contextualized comparison” (Locke et al., 1995: 361) of three cases in the discussion (Chapter 9). Having proposed an original operationalisation of MLG as analytical framework, the thesis will turn to the demonstration of how qualitative research methods are best suited to answer the research questions in the next chapter.

3.3 Conclusion

Previous studies have shown that governmental responses to platform work are influenced by a combination of factors, ranging from legislative competences (Wolf, 2022) to public pressure from non-state actors (Aguilera et al., 2019) and governance structures (Tabascio et al., 2021). Accounting for these influences on municipal level requires a comprehensive analytical framework, such as MLG. MLG can unveil the influence of institutional constraints and non-state actors on municipal policy in different urban settings. Once modified to consider platform work’s perception among city officials, an investigation of platform work in the municipal arena through MLG can bridge the existing knowledge gaps and shed light on the reasons for distinct responses of different city governments. In fact, the four MLG indicators will be applied in each of the three case studies (Chapters 5-7) and the pandemic chapter (8). First, though, the following chapter will argue for the use of qualitative research methods to identify and analyse the four indicators, thus capturing the influences behind municipal responses to platform work.

4. Research methods and methodology

This thesis is based on new empirical data from Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco. Since it aims to uncover the influences on respective municipal responses to platform work, to which the discussion of multi-level governance (MLG) alerted in the preceding chapter, it engages in policy analysis as defined by Kaufmann et al. (2020). The research constitutes an investigation of the urban “complexity of policy making with interdependencies within and across boundaries [...] and its multiple sources of authority both within and outside of government” (ibid.: 2). According to Majchrzak et al. (2014: 9), research on policy can be robust if it exhibits five key characteristics: it should be (1) credible and informed by evidence; (2) responsible and ethically justifiable; (3) creative; (4) meaningful; and ultimately (5) manageable. The chapter will demonstrate how methods and methodology of the present study fulfil these criteria. It seeks to achieve *credibility* based on the triangulation of data sources and transparency of methodological choices; *responsibility* based on the consideration and mitigation of ethical risks, with particular attention to the effects of Covid-19 on researcher and research participants; *creativity* through the application of MLG to qualitative data from Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco; *meaningfulness* through the identification of important knowledge gaps in the literature; and *manageability* via a careful selection of insightful cases by means of conducting a horizon scan.

Research methods and methodology will be outlined in the following steps. After a discussion of the data needs arising from the three research questions, the chapter will proceed to justifying the choice of qualitative methods in Section 4.2 and outline my ontological and epistemological foundations which inform that choice. A brief overview of the methodological and substantial effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the research project will be followed by an in-depth account of the diverse stages of the data collection and analysis processes in Section 4.3. Apart from the literature review and a horizon scan of 73 potential cases, these stages primarily contain detailed documentary analysis of 14 policy documents from Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco as well as 17 extensive remote interviews – 15 synchronous and 2 asynchronous – with 19 participants from the respective cities. I coded documents and interview transcripts electronically using QSR NVivo 12 software and conducted several rounds of deductive and inductive coding.

Although the pandemic challenged the research process in several ways, for instance due to travel restrictions and by hampering access to interview participants, I took appropriate mitigation measures to ensure uninterrupted data collection and achievement of data saturation. These measures included the use of remote conferencing software, triangulation of data sources, and greater emphasis on documentary analysis. In all, the qualitative methods applied in this project, and particularly the use of case studies, represent common research methods in scholarly investigations of platform urbanism and municipal policies, enlightening specific local contexts that shape them.

4.1 Three research questions

The discussion of the literature in the previous two chapters led to the observation that cities, though being a main locus of platform work and the precarious work arrangements it favours, and their respective governments have not yet been sufficiently considered in the governance of app-based work. Therefore, it seems worthwhile and important to combine the analysis of that phenomenon with an urban focus and ask why different municipalities steer platform work in distinct ways. Table 3 summarises the questions which have arisen from the literature review as well as the data required to answer them.

Table 3: Summary of the three research questions and the data necessary to answer them.

	Research questions	Data needs
RQ 1	<i>What kinds of policy interventions have city governments used to respond to the rise in platform work?</i>	A selective overview of policies from city governments around the world requires data that describe rather than count them
RQ 2	<i>Which influences have shaped municipal responses to platform work?</i>	Explaining the roles of state and non-state actors necessitates data on their motivations and decision-making powers, as well as on the institutional context within which they act
RQ 3	<i>How did the Covid-19 pandemic affect municipal responses to platform work?</i>	Data on state and non-state actors' involvement as well as the role of institutional structures in shaping municipal responses demand a temporal focus on the pandemic period

The first question (RQ 1) seeks to explore the range of policy initiatives some city governments have adopted to manage platform work. Hence, the search and exploration of such policies demands data which mention and describe rather than count them: the question is interested in the scope and nature of policies, not in their number. As the preceding discussion of the conceptual literature (Chapter 3) already highlighted, municipal policies can take a variety of forms and need not be of regulatory nature, as city governments' formal or legislative competences on platform work are constrained. In fact, they can be "soft" (Majoor et al., 2015: 114) policy tools, including mediation between stakeholders, the tolerance of app-based work, or even its promotion. Thus, one could expect a wide range of measures adopted by city governments in relation to platform work. The variegated shapes and nature of policies municipalities can implement moreover explains why this thesis primarily uses the term "municipal response".

Research question two (RQ 2), interested in the factors that have shaped and led to such policies, or responses, requires data that can explain the role of urban stakeholders on their formulation and implementation as well as the influence of institutional structures. The conceptual literature stressed how city governments sit at the intersection of different levels, having to manage non-state actors' interests on one hand while facing limited competences within national governmental hierarchies on the other. Data on the four indicators of multi-level governance are required to enlighten these influences.

Going a step further, the third research question (RQ 3) is interested in the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on municipal responses to platform work, and if any emerged, what led to those changes. The data required is similar to RQ 2, yet with a specific temporal focus, namely municipal responses during periods of lockdown in 2020 and 2021. The rest of this chapter will elaborate how the necessary data can be collected and interpreted with a view to answering the three questions. Before explaining the project's ontological and epistemological foundations, I will define the units of analysis and observation which guide the choice of research methods.

4.2 Qualitative research approach

This section is concerned with the issue of how to generate the data through which above research questions can be answered. It will justify the use of qualitative research methods for studying the unit of analysis – municipal policy – within a case study framework, based on my ontological and epistemological positions as well as the research objectives. Since large parts of the research were conducted during an extraordinary historical period, the Covid-19 pandemic, the section will also consider the pandemic’s effects on the diverse research processes and show which mitigation measures were put in place to address them.

4.2.1 Defining and capturing the unit of analysis

At the onset, answering the research questions requires the identification of the unit of analysis – what and who is being studied (Kumar, 2018: 80) – as the unit defines the type of data a researcher can collect. In all three RQs, the unit of analysis is “municipal policy” (or municipal response) and different aspects thereof. RQ 1 asks for examples of municipal policies addressing platform work, while RQ 2 is concerned with how a selected number of examples of such policy have come into being, and RQ 3 seeks to analyse whether and how the selected municipal policies changed during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the identification of municipal policy leads us to what Long (2004) highlighted as common challenge in social science research: the unit of analysis often cannot be measured or grasped “in a straightforward way” (ibid.: 1158). In the absence of a distinct municipal policy analysis which could facilitate answering the RQs by enlightening the influences behind the respective policies (Kaufmann et al., 2020: 1), it needs to be asked how to define and capture the unit of analysis, municipal policy.

Jabal et al. (2019: 2) defined policy as “directives given by a managing party to one or more managed parties in order to guide their behaviour”. A crucial element of their definition is the existence of different “parties”, or actors, the interplay between them as well as the power dynamics in their relationship. If one accepts that definition and assumes that the interaction of actors – a common unit of analysis in social sciences (Bouckee, 1923) – is the defining characteristic of a policy, research requires some theoretical frame to explain the role of agency and who has the power to act, or “manage” in Jabal et al.’s (2019: 2) words. The leeway for managing the interests of actors links back to the discussion of the conceptual literature and the insights provided by governance approaches to policy analyses. As was

shown in the previous chapter, policy outcomes not only depend on how well governmental entities are capable of managing the influence non-state actors seek to exert on policy processes, but also on the institutional structures within which state and non-state actors act. Kaufmann et al. (2020: 3) argued that both agency and structure – “interdependencies within and across boundaries” and “multiple sources of authority both within and outside of government” – are significant elements in accounting for the actions of municipal governments. Any analysis of municipal policy therefore needs to capture the above elements, hence supporting the use of multi-level governance (MLG), as demonstrated earlier. Meanwhile, the term “municipal” is deliberately chosen over “urban” as the analysis aims to uncover the actions and motivations of municipalities, or city governments. Urban policy can be understood as policies instituted by higher governmental levels, whereas here, the study is concerned with the responses of city governments and the influences that shape them.

Having elaborated on the characteristics of the unit of analysis, it needs to be discussed how that unit can be captured and hence used to generate data. The scientific literature refers to the object through which the unit of analysis can be approached and examined as “unit of observation” (Dolma, 2010: 171). Documents and individuals represent two of the most common units of observation, including in policy research where they constitute “almost all likely sources of information”, as Bardach (2009: 69) pointed out. It is for these units that a researcher can select data collection methods, such as documentary analysis and interviews, respectively. Examples for academic studies using these sources for policy analysis in cities are too numerous to be named here, but three of them shall be mentioned for studying the platform economy or app-based work in an urban context: Beer et al.’s (2017) classification of regulatory responses of various US cities to the rise of ride-hailing platforms, Esbenshade et al. (2019) on the municipal management of ride-hailing platforms in San Diego, and Colomb et al. (2023) on city governments’ reactions to short-term rental platforms in twelve European cities. One should note, however, that while data collection is linked to the unit of observation, research conclusions are ultimately based on the unit of analysis as they must reply to the initial research questions (Kumar, 2018: 77).

On this note, it should be mentioned that the terms “policy analysis” and “policy research” are used interchangeably in the literature (Engeli et al., 2014: 2). Throughout this study, I will generally use the former term. Strictly speaking, this study engages in policy analysis

because it identifies a policy challenge – the growth of platform work and its contribution to precarious work in cities – and analyses how different municipal governmental authorities have addressed it, similar to Coulthart’s (2017) or Rihoux et al.’s (2006) definition of *policy analysis*. Meanwhile, I follow recommendations for insightful and robust *policy research* as proposed by Majchrzak et al. (2014) or Petrie (2013), for instance on how to produce insightful and meaningful conclusions from primary data, and these two concepts do not exclude each other.

According to the classification by Browne et al. (2018: 1032), there are three types of policy analysis requiring different though overlapping research methods: traditional, mainstream, and interpretive policy analysis. Table 4 summarises the three types and the methods they demand. Since the present unit of analysis focuses on the interaction of state and non-state actors within institutional structures, to which MLG alerts, *mainstream* policy analysis through qualitative research methods appears most suitable for shedding light on the role of stakeholders, Browne et al. (2018) suggested. Additionally, the present study also holds elements of *interpretive* policy analysis because it seeks to understand the perception of app-based work by municipal officials. Qualitative methods including documentary analysis and interviews are suitable for that purpose, too. Following the discussion of which units and sources I want to examine, it will be asked next how such qualitative methods are helpful instruments for extracting meaning from the sources.

Table 4: Categorisation of policy analysis types based on Browne et al. (2018: 1034).

Policy analysis type	Analytical focus	Type of RQ	Research methods
Traditional	Facts	<i>Outcome questions: what is the optimal solution to a policy problem?</i>	Quantitative modelling, cost-benefit-analysis
Mainstream	Values, actors	<i>Interaction questions: whose voices are heard?</i>	Interviews, documentary analysis, surveys
Interpretive	Meaning	<i>Representation questions: how is the policy problem defined?</i>	Interviews, documentary analysis, ethnography, historical methods

4.2.2 Ontological and epistemological positions

Following the definition of unit of analysis, the choice of research methods moreover depends on a researcher's ontological and epistemological positions. The aim of any scientific inquiry, according to Flyvbjerg (2001: 132), consists of "getting close to reality". Yet, different theoretical schools have different views on what constitutes reality and how one can get close to it. Dilthey (King et al., 2010: 14) for example argued that natural and social sciences require different kinds of investigation. Even within these broad scientific categories, there is no single conception of reality. In other words, the methods through which a researcher can extract meaning from data sources and generate knowledge depend on the researcher's perspective of what is reality and what counts as evidence thereof. Hence, an ontological position, defined by Blaikie (1993: 6) as the "assumptions that a particular approach to social enquiry makes about the nature of social reality", influences which units of observation are thought to constitute reality. Considering the preceding discussion of policy analysis and the implicit argument that the interaction of individuals within institutional structures is central to explaining the emergence of certain policies, my ontological position is relativist, not realist: reality does not exist "independently from us" but crucially is shaped and produced by "people engaging with each other" (King et al., 2010: 9). Consequently, it is assumed here that human interaction as well as texts are "meaningful constituents of the social world", to use Mason's (2002: 106) words.

In order to capture such vision of reality, a qualitative methods approach seems better suited than a quantitative one. While the natural sciences mostly rely on a deductive approach with empirical testing for which quantitative approaches are appropriate, the present RQs demand a more nuanced approach which captures the peculiarities of specific policies in specific contexts. In their categorisation of policy analysis types, Patton et al. (2013: 22) argued that *ex post* analysis, which corresponds to all three present RQs, is descriptive, yet such characterisation seems slightly misleading. This inquiry does involve a descriptive element, particularly in the early exploration of municipal policies, but the ultimate aim is to go beyond description towards an understanding of selected cases, for which qualitative methods are more suitable. Furthermore, Lindsay's (Courmont, 2018: 8) statement that "cities are the weirdest system to quantify" might have been colloquially formulated, still it points to the benefits of a qualitative approach to studying cities. Even if some numerical indicators can reflect an urban phenomenon, for example the growth of platform work, its

interactions with the complex social, economic, and political structures of a city are best understood through the application of qualitative instruments.

In terms of epistemology, the previous considerations imply that my epistemological position is contextual. On one hand, such position assumes that interaction and texts constitute evidence of the ontology outlined above and hence count as knowledge (Mason, 2002: 107), following Rorty's (1979) proposition that knowledge can be generated through conversation. On the other hand, the complexity of the unit of analysis suggests that the findings may be relevant to a "limited constituency" only (King et al., 2010: 21), namely to the particular cases chosen for analysis. The rationale for employing policy analysis within the framework of the case study approach will be addressed next.

4.2.3 Case study approach

One prism, though not a methodology per se (Stake, 2005: 443), through which to examine the unit of analysis is the case study approach. Case studies constitute a widely used tool for understanding a policy as they enlighten the context in which it arose (Petrie, 2013: 9), therefore helping to answer questions of how and why (Meyer, 2001: 330). Researchers employ case studies to explore how variables impact on a unit of analysis (Majchrzak et al., 2014: 82), variables which are "proper to each territory" (Courmont, 2018: 20) and thus need to be carefully analysed. Put differently, cases are useful instruments for researchers who wish to acquire a "three-dimensional picture" of a phenomenon (Thomas, 2011: 4) that deepens understanding of a unit of analysis within its particular context. This seems especially pertinent for the study of a complex entity such as municipal policy, as discussed previously. In fact, earlier investigations (Zanatta et al., 2018; Brail, 2018; Reilly et al., 2019) on the management of platforms and platform work by governments, highlighted in the conceptual literature review (Chapter 3), have often relied on case study approaches to aid their analyses.

The questions of what precisely constitutes a case and whether a case is identical to the unit of analysis have been subjects of scholarly debates, succinctly summarised by Grünbaum (2007). This thesis follows Wieviorka's (1992: 159) concept and regards a case as the context in which the unit of analysis is embedded and shaped, or "contained", reflected in

Thomas' (2011: 12) literal understanding of a case as “container”. In other words, I regard the case as a heuristic device – a tool for investigation – which enables to explore the unit of analysis within the specific contexts of a case. In this study, “municipal policy” represents the unit of analysis, while cities form the cases.

Answering the research questions requires a deliberate and informed selection of cases. After all, analysing all cities worldwide would not be fruitful, violating two of Majchrzak et al.'s (2014) five criteria of robust policy research: such catch-all approach would neither be manageable, given my time constraints, nor meaningful, sacrificing depth and nuance for a superficial account that would probably not provide valuable insights into municipal management of app-based work. Aim and rationale of a research project should dictate the sample size and choice of cases. The discussion of the conceptual literature (Chapter 3) highlighted the different factors and their complex interplay that can determine how municipalities steer platform work, and dealing with such complexity requires a focused and nuanced study of a limited number of cases.

Apart from adopting the appropriate sample size, the quality of a case study is determined by the choice of cases. By means of conducting a five-stage horizon scan, I aimed to gain an initial overview over potential cities and their respective municipal policies. Section 4.3.2 will discuss the different stages in greater detail. Broadly speaking, the ultimate case selection was based on cases' “information richness” (Crabtree et al., 1992: n.p.) or availability of documents online, allowing for the examination of policy materials that could serve as starting points for subsequent interviews with local stakeholders. Moreover, the horizon scan aimed to discover “outlier cases”, to adopt Thomas' (2011: 77) distinction of case types, which would promise insights into the potential of city governments to respond innovatively to the growth of platform work, even if their national contexts might not suggest such level of public role or provision. Following a horizon scan of 73 cities (Section 4.3.2), San Francisco in the US, Madrid in Spain, and Milan in Italy turned out to fulfil these premises.

4.2.3.1 *The case for contextualised comparisons of cities*

Apart from considering each case on its own, this research aims to contribute to knowledge on platform work governance through their comparison. The comparison of cities for the sake of developing a deeper understanding of each respective city has a long tradition in the urban governance literature (Gissendanner, 2003) as well as in studies on platform urbanism, as Artioli (2018) demonstrated in her review of the academic debate on platforms in cities. Beer (2017), Vith et al. (2019), and Voytenko Palgan et al. (2021)'s contributions were already highlighted in Chapter 3 for their use of comparison in showing how municipalities steer the sharing economy and its local externalities, though not emphasising the reasons for why city governments do so. Aguilera et al. (2019)'s investigation of municipal responses to platform companies deserves special consideration for the systematic approach it chose in considering three cities – Paris, Milan, and Barcelona – side by side. Drawing on a commonly used approach in comparative politics, and influenced by Hague et al. (2007), the study applied a most dissimilar systems (MDS) design which sought to explain different regulatory outputs towards Airbnb in the three cases.

However, the application of MDS, and its variation as most similar systems (MSS) design, has been criticised because cases rarely are entirely similar or dissimilar. The risk of comparing “apples and oranges” (Locke et al., 1995: 338), or cases that might seem similar at first sight yet actually reveal notable differences, led Locke et al. (ibid.: 338) to suggest “contextualized comparisons”. Their approach ought to highlight differences in cases that seem similar, and reveal “unexpected parallels” (ibid.: 338) in seemingly different ones. According to Locke et al., the need for a nuanced, contextualised comparison of cases stems from the observation that global trends do not produce similar pressures on “lower levels across countries” but are “mediated by [...] institutional arrangements” (ibid.: 338), thus resulting in diverging policy outcomes. This insight also seems pertinent when considering the effects of, and reactions to, platforms in national and subnational governance processes. Thelen (2018) crucially alerted to the variations of seemingly similar interest groups, for instance trade unions, involved in the regulation of Uber across countries, and to the highly diverse responses to the platform's emergence. “Contextualized comparisons” point to the “institutional and ideological” (Locke et al., 1995: 361) circumstances in respective cases and emphasise both parallels and differences between them, producing a richer understanding of the issue in question and how it interacts with local context. The application of contextualised comparisons promises interesting insights since the case studies of San Francisco, Milan, and Madrid will indeed emphasise how the global trend of platform work

has provoked different reactions across these cities, due to city-specific influences identified through the MLG framework.

Therefore, comparison not only helps to avoid a purely descriptive account of a phenomenon (Thomas, 2011), but it contributes to a better understanding of such “topic of interest” (Engeli et al., 2014: 35), for instance of platform work governance. In other words, comparing cases, even when they are not entirely similar or dissimilar, benefits theory testing and building (Gissendanner, 2003). The comparison of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco in Chapter 9 will hence inform the development and sharpening of theoretical accounts of platform work governance.

4.2.4 Ensuring research validity and reliability

In academic research, the concepts of validity and reliability are employed to evaluate the quality of a research project. According to Engeli et al. (2014: 49), internal validity indicates the extent to which researchers find what they set out to find and thus reflects the suitability of research methods for the given research questions. Meanwhile, external validity refers to the ability to generalise from the findings. It was already hinted at earlier that the usefulness of external validity for evaluating the case study approach is contested since the complex variables of cases limit their scope for generalisations in different contexts. Indeed, Thomas (2011: 63) argued that neither validity nor reliability are dependable guides when it comes to testing case studies. Moreover, common methods of the case study approach, especially interviews, will in most cases yield different results over time, weakening the concept of reliability, a concept which refers to the consistency of findings between researchers and across time.

If these two concepts are uncertain to provide indications on the quality of this research, how can one ensure the credibility and professionalism that must be expected from a serious piece of academic inquiry? First, a fundamental method consists of data triangulation, or use of multiple data sources (Patton et al., 2013: 96). Combining documentary analysis and interviews during the process of data collection is supposed to ensure that retrieved information is not only factually true but also correctly interpreted. In fact, studies in policy analysis or case studies rarely rely only one data source, and the present research follows

their example. Second, methodological transparency contributes to the credibility of a study's conclusions. Rihoux et al. (2006: 3) considered a transparent and detailed account of methodological choices particularly important for case studies, which could otherwise be accused of being unscientific as one can "allegedly prove almost anything" with them. By using Majchrzak et al.'s (2014) criteria for robust policy research as yardstick for justifying the research design, I aim to provide precisely that transparency in the present thesis. Third, Sanderson (2002: 19) called on policy scholars to adopt a "degree of modesty" about what their studies can achieve. In this case, I am aware that the limited sample size as well as the complex nature of case studies do not allow for generalisations. Accordingly, the research objectives focus on understanding the selected cases, outlining their potential lessons for other cities, and considering how their findings can inform theories on platform work governance. Lastly, I attempt to show a high degree of reflexivity by scrutinising my own role in generating knowledge and the ways through which it can affect the findings of this project. The need for reflexivity was informed by Mason's (2002: 5) argument that researchers' "thoughts, actions and decisions shape how [they] research and what [they] see". Reflexive processes include questioning one's own motivations for conducting research and paying attention to separating personal opinion from facts and research participants' views. Even though I follow an agenda, both attempting to conduct robust research that furthers understanding of platform work in cities while also earning an academic degree, I am careful to consider a variety of viewpoints and be respectful towards possibly contradicting opinions of participants, as Finlay (2002: 536) urged social scientists to be. The nuanced in-depth analysis required by case studies allows to account for and explain potential contradictory evidence particularly well.

4.2.5 Adjusting to the impact of Covid-19

Major parts of the present research were conducted in a particular historical period, namely during the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. Although it is too soon to determine its long-term consequences for urban economies and populations, the pandemic's reverberations likely affected not only methodological choices but also substantial findings. In terms of methodology, the approach towards one unit of observation, people, had to be adjusted to minimise physical contact and the possibility of a transmission of the virus. Since it would not have been ethically justifiable to risk participants' or my own health and thus in violation of one of Majchrzak et al.'s (2014) criteria, the qualitative methods were transferred to the

online sphere. Instead of travelling to the three cities and conducting the research on site, I chose to hold interviews via online conferencing software; please see Section 4.3.4 for a detailed account.

Fortunately, relying on the internet for the execution of interviews is not an entirely novel approach in the social sciences, hence Fox et al. (2017), Kite et al. (2017), and Woodyatt et al. (2016) served as guides for qualitative research in the online sphere: they helped to ensure that transferring interviews onto conferencing software, in this case Zoom, would produce equally rich results as in-person ones. However, the consequences of the pandemic on mental health through increasing levels of anxiety and stress also meant that online data collection involving participants had to consider effects on their wellbeing, especially in hard-hit cities such as Madrid and Milan. That is why I offered repeated breaks and reminded interviewees that they could end their participation at any point without providing a reason, as further elaborated in later sections.

Still, two challenges arose from the reliance on remote interviewing. First, recruitment depended entirely on email, either by contacting promising individuals directly or by following up on leads provided by earlier participants. Travel restrictions during much of 2020 and 2021 made networking and recruitment in the respective cities impossible. Second, the additional personal and professional challenges exacerbated by the pandemic might have explained the low response to invitations to participate in the research, an issue Section 4.3.4 will discuss. The use of documentary analysis and data triangulation, for instance by asking participants to confirm or elaborate on findings from policy papers, helped to address this issue.

In terms of substance, the challenges arising from Covid-19 were linked to the issue of time. The aspect of sampling time is considered important in the social sciences as it defines whether a study focuses on a phenomenon at a particular point in time or on its change over time (Meyer, 2001: 333). This study pursued the former, cross-sectional approach, though at two different points. RQs 1 and 2 were interested in municipal policies prior to the pandemic, while RQ 3 asked how the pandemic affected those policies. The first research stages of literature review, documentary analysis, and horizon scan were conducted in late 2019 and early to mid-2020, before and during the onset of the pandemic, and should not

have reflected the impact of Covid-19 on municipal policy. Therefore, the first stages provided adequate insights for answering RQs 1 and 2. During the further stages involving participants, however, responses and experiences might have been shaped by the pandemic, potentially even subconsciously. Interviews took place in early and mid-2021, a year after the coronavirus first emerged and at the height of lockdowns in the three cases. Aware of the particular historical circumstances, I deliberately asked participants if they could observe changes in policy priorities and processes due to the pandemic. To take account of the special circumstances, Chapter 8 is dedicated to RQ 3 and the effects of the pandemic on city governments' responses to platform work, highlighting how Covid-19 reinforced perceptions of and approaches to such work by municipal officials. Having justified the methodological choices of the present study, it shall now be explained how data collection and analysis proceeded.

4.3 Conducting the research

The following sections will elaborate on the different phases of the research project, beginning with the literature review and horizon scan before proceeding to the major stages of qualitative data collection and analysis. Documentary analysis of 14 policy documents from the three cases of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco, as well as 15 synchronous and 2 asynchronous interviews conducted remotely with diverse stakeholder groups in those cities formed the main pillars. The procedures of choosing cases for in-depth case studies will also be addressed in detail, as will be the coding cycles for analysing primary data using NVivo-12 software.

4.3.1 Phase 1: Literature review

Within the frame of policy analysis, the literature review corresponded to what Weimer and Vining (Patton et al., 2013: 40) called “problem analysis” and Coulthart (2017: 636) referred to as “problem structuring”. Such identification of problem or intellectual puzzle serves to set the stage for the planned inquiry and therefore “guides the rest of the analysis” (ibid.: 639): choices of units of analysis and observation, data sources, and research methods are made accordingly. The review hence aimed to identify the main debates and scholarly contributions that fall under the broad categories of platform work, its contribution to

precarious workforces, and platform regulation and governance in cities, and to create a structure that highlights common themes and unresolved “problems” of those debates, or knowledge gaps.

Thus, reviewing the literature helped to delineate and define the boundaries of this inquiry, locate the present study within the broader discourse on platform urbanism and app-based work, and identify knowledge gaps the research could fill. By using online bibliographic databases, predominantly SCOPUS and JSTOR, I sought to discover the most significant and authoritative sources, which primarily included academic journal articles and reports by research institutes. Within those pieces, references to rankings and reports published by thinktanks, international organisations, or governments at national and local levels formed another pillar of literary sources, particularly for the subsequent horizon scan and case selection (Section 4.3.2). Additionally, I made extensive use of Glasgow University’s main library to locate sources which had not yet been made digitally available. Regarding its timing, the literature was reviewed continuously, though more extensively at the beginning as well as at the end of the research process, in mid-2019 and late 2022. This helped to delineate the literature and update the review with the latest findings on the platform economy, respectively. The List of References reflects the review’s whole extent, while Chapters 2 and 3 present the outcome of this initial research stage in a condensed and structured manner.

4.3.2 Phase 2: Selection of cases via horizon scan

The chapter has previously alluded to the importance of case selection for the quality and meaningfulness of the case study approach. The following paragraphs will explain how the process of horizon scanning provided a systematic approach towards selecting insightful cases. Horizon scanning is an established method for the detection of emerging trends. Although there is no commonly agreed step-by-step guide of how to conduct a horizon scan (Cuhls et al., 2015: 5), one can distinguish between two broad objectives of this method: issue-centred, and exploratory (Amanatidou et al., 2012: 210). The former serves to support a hypothesis, while the latter searches for information about new developments in a policy domain, for example platform governance. Responding to the first research question, the scan aimed to identify diverse municipal policies responding to the growing group of

platform workers, the consequent rise in precarious work, and the tensions arising from the platform sector in cities. Since the RQ was concerned with shedding light into the wide variety of potential policies, the horizon scan was exploratory as well as stand-alone, in contrast to continuous horizon scanning over a range of time.

In a report for the European Commission, the Fraunhofer Institute (Cuhls et al., 2015: 20) advised five instances for horizon scans: 1. defining a scan field, 2. characterising the scan field, 3. selecting sources and methods, 4. searching the scan theme, and 5. searching for context. These instances, together with a previously conducted horizon scan of smart-eco cities (Caprotti et al., 2016) consulted for the fourth instance, formed the blueprint for the following scan and its five-stage process (Table 5). The final product of the scan – a list of 73 cities undergoing several sifts and resulting in the choice of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco – can be found in Appendix A.

Table 5: The five stages of horizon scanning and the number of cities passing each stage.

Scan stages	Objectives	Number of cities
Stage 1	Defining and characterising the scan field, picking promising sources (<i>corresponding to instances 1-3 proposed by the Fraunhofer Institute</i>)	73
Stage 2	Scanning the city profiles for policies and innovations in platform work governance or management of precarity (<i>instance 4 proposed by Fraunhofer Institute</i>)	18
Stage 3	Clarifying if the municipal government initiated or promoted the policy identified in stage 2	16
Stage 4	Identifying supporting evidence and ensuring availability of policy documents for further study	11
Stage 5	Investigating a city's context through consideration of national platform regulation, academic studies, or local lawsuits against platforms (<i>instance 5 proposed by Fraunhofer Institute</i>)	3

In line with the Fraunhofer Institute's (Cuhls et al., 2015) first instance, I defined the scan field very broadly. The objective of the scan was the exploration of information on municipal policies and innovations regarding platform work from around the world available online. Crucially, such innovations could and should take a variety of forms: not only are they innovative after all, but municipal policies on app-based work may not resemble policies of the national level. Therefore, in order to find such novel forms of policies and initiatives, I

consulted online search engines Google, Google Scholar, and Bing and searched for “municipal platform management”, “cities platform economy policies”, “cities gig work regulation” and “municipal platform policy innovation” *inter alia* to find reports, case studies, rankings, and city profiles.

With regard to the second instance, characterising the scan field reveals the limitations of the horizon scan. Since I solely included English search results, it is likely I missed out on rankings and city profiles in other languages and hence potentially created a bias towards UK, US, or Western cities in general. Moreover, policies can be at different stages – between conception to implementation and completion. Interestingly, the results of the online search did not produce any material on early policy stages, including proposals or intentions. Hence, interesting proposals such as the intention of Beijing’s city government to provide accommodation to platform delivery workers did not feature in the scan. Similarly, the proposal of San Francisco’s City Hall to support platform workers in acquiring healthcare only emerged during later stages of documentary analysis.

Concerning the selection of sources, which corresponds to the third instance suggested by Cuhls et al. (2015), I selected papers based on their potential for including or elaborating on innovative policies targeting platform work. Since such work is regarded a major source of precarity in urban labour markets, as the literature review underlined, it was worthwhile to consider how municipalities manage such precarity and if they see app-based work as one of its causes. The full list of sources and their respective criteria can be found in Appendix A. The reports can be distinguished in three groups: the first group (published by Roland Berger, IMD, and Sharing Cities Action) offered an overview of city governments engaging with digital and technological tools or with platform companies to solve social or economic challenges. Following Neirotti et al.’s (2014: 26) study which includes “social inclusion and welfare” as one of the cornerstones of smart city strategies, it could be expected that smart city rankings offered a glimpse into innovations targeting precarious work arrangements. The IMD Smart City Index, for instance, includes a score measuring the priority of “fulfilling employment”, while the Sharing Cities Action report dedicates one section on the policies of municipal governments *vis-à-vis* platform companies. The second group (by WEF, NYU, NCF, and UNESCO) highlighted urban innovations in a broader field of disciplines but also touched upon policies in training and upskilling workers. Finally, the third group (with publications by URBACT, UIA, and NLC) focused on urban policies in response to

increasing automation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, among which app-based work can be included. As these broad themes are overlapping, some cities were mentioned in several sources, yet in the list of cities they were included only once and where most relevant to platform urbanism, precarity, or workers' welfare. Informed by the first three instances, this initial scanning stage resulted in a list of 73 cities.

The fourth instance in Cuhls et al.'s (2015) scanning method progressed in several stages (see Table 5) and aimed to narrow the pool of 73 cities to a number suitable for in-depth study. Caprotti et al.'s (2016) scan served as blueprint for these stages. Stage 2 of this instance scanned the cities for innovative responses to workers' rights or the platform economy (rather than, for example, mobility, environment, or e-government). Moreover, this step required online research for the first group of sources on smart and sharing cities to identify whether their rankings corresponded to innovation in terms of tackling challenges in urban labour markets. If cities were indeed mentioned for such policies, stage 3 asked if municipal governments were driving, initiating, or promoting that response, instead of national governments or private stakeholders. The next sift, stage 4, delved more deeply into the remaining cities and aimed to identify supporting evidence and information by searching the websites of the respective municipal governments. Put differently, this stage served to clarify if sufficient data, particularly official policy documents, were available for further investigation.

Lastly, stage 5 corresponded to the Fraunhofer Institute's fifth instance and selected those cities whose background and context promised the most interesting insights on how municipal policies are affected by different stakeholders or if they present a stark contrast to the respective national response to platform work. In that regard, newspaper articles, academic studies, lawsuits initiated by local app-based workers, and national platform regulation proved helpful to get a sense of each city's specific challenges and responses regarding ongoing transformations in their labour markets. Three diverse cities emerged as interesting cases for how their respective municipalities manage platform work: Madrid (Spain), Milan (Italy), and San Francisco (USA). Later, Section 4.5 will briefly introduce the cities, before Chapters 5-7 will analyse each case in turn.

4.3.3 Phase 3: Documentary analysis of policy papers

Informed by the result of the horizon scan, the next step involved an exploration of the policy contexts of the three cases, Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco. While the scan highlighted some factors which contribute to the cities' interesting policy context, documentary analysis served to dig deeper into the selected cities. In contrast to the subsequent research stage of semi-structured interviews, which aimed to enlighten the influence and structures of governance processes on platform work to which MLG alerted, documentary analysis focused on two issues: the nature and basic elements of municipal responses to the phenomenon, as well as the salience and framing of app-based work in the respective papers.

Similar to the horizon scan, my selection of policy documents from each of the three cities progressed in several steps. The first step involved searching the respective municipal government's websites for promising documents, including reports, presentations, and white papers on municipal initiatives that feature app-based work, precarious work, and changes in the local labour market due to digitalisation. Apart from using the search function to scan the websites, I primarily focused on the publications sections of the offices for economic and social affairs: San Francisco's Office for Economic and Workforce Development, Milan's Directorate for Urban Economy and Employment (*Direzione Economia Urbana e Lavoro*), and Madrid's municipal section for Economy, Innovation and Employment (*Área de Gobierno de Economía, Innovación y Empleo*). Moreover, I included one policy journal on Madrid's municipal MARES programme, published by a private research institute but a highly valuable addition to the official texts. This initial step produced a selection of 20 documents overall. Please refer to Appendix B for a list of those documents and further details on authors and years of publication. In a second sift, I read each text and discarded those which did not refer to the issues in question or which related to aspects of the urban economy irrelevant to the present inquiry, for example industrial policy, social care, or education. Following that sift, fourteen texts were chosen for in-depth documentary analysis with QSR NVivo software.

For the sake of methodological transparency, it should be noted that the processes of searching and selecting documents raised a number of issues concerning language barriers, time, and availability. First, most of the texts from Milan's and Madrid's municipal

authorities were in the native languages and hence necessitated translation. While my level of Italian was sufficient to understand Milan's reports, I had to translate Spanish texts in Madrid's case using online translation software. The different languages should not have limited the validity of the subsequent documentary analysis, however, since I coded all fourteen texts in English to ensure uniform application of codes across the three cities.

Second, the chosen documents were published at different times between 2013 and 2020, even within cities, and might hence reflect conflicting policy priorities and initiatives that undermine the study's meaningfulness. Although it would have been possible to focus on one particular year, the primary concern was to analyse the latest available publication to capture information about municipal responses that is as recent as possible. Furthermore, aware of the fact that different publication years might affect findings, I paid particular attention to indications about conflicting objectives but did not observe discrepancies across time. Third, not only does the selection of texts obviously limit the range of facts and details that can be examined, but it can be assumed that not all written information on municipal responses to app-based work is available online. Thus, conducting interviews was crucial to get a richer insight into the different approaches towards precarity and platform work, analyse the MLG indicators of each case, and understand the priorities of each city government. Documentary analysis served as foundation for later stages of data collection and constituted the first building block of the case studies, both by providing data as well as by pointing towards municipal departments and officials that could present insightful interview participants.

4.3.3.1 Computer-assisted qualitative analysis

QSR NVivo is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) that supports researchers in working with different types of data – including texts, audio files, and images – and extracting meaning from them. While the software can contribute to a more rigorous and systematic data analysis (Bazeley, 2007: 3; Zamawe, 2015: 13), it cannot replace the “creativity, insight, and intuition” (Leech et al., 2011: 78) of a researcher who is ultimately responsible for the choice of coding style and types of queries. Therefore, principles of manual documentary analysis and coding still apply to the computer-assisted approach. For the present study, I made use of the twelfth version of NVivo.

The analysis itself relied on a combination of deductive and inductive coding, as recommended by Woodyatt et al. (2016: 744). Such approach was previously employed in another study on municipal policy initiatives to great effect (Caprotti et al., 2016). Building on a list of “provisional codes” (Miles et al., 2014: 77) for a deductive coding cycle, I first coded all texts according to a uniform list of deliberately broad categories which served to provide an insight into the nature and constituent elements of municipal policies on platform work, stakeholders involved in their formulation or execution, and policy objectives. My choice of categories was inspired by Gentilini’s (2015) case study of municipal social policy in New York and was complemented by a provisional code for objectives to examine what the initiatives were hoped to achieve. As a result, four provisional coding categories formed the basis of the first coding cycle: ‘challenges’ (enlightening how the challenge of platform work is framed in the specific document), ‘responses’ (actions taken by the municipal government to respond to precarious work and platform work), ‘actors’ (parties involved in the choice or implementation of municipal responses), and ‘aims’ (what ought to be achieved or changed according to the municipal government). In addition, I created a fifth provisional code for ‘economic indices’ to gather basic data from the papers that could be useful in later stages of the research. For the category of ‘responses’, I borrowed further subcategories from Mercier et al.’s (2016: 95) classification of municipal policy instruments to help characterise each city’s approach towards app-based work.

The second cycle took a more grounded approach, let codes emerge from the texts, refined the categories borrowed from Gentilini (2015), and complemented them. For example, I inductively created various subcodes within the broad category of ‘aims’, such as ‘create employment’, ‘support living standards’, or ‘upskilling’ while studying the texts: the codebook can be found in Appendix B. I linked phrases and passages from the respective papers to the codes. Using NVivo’s matrix coding function to highlight the characteristics of each municipality’s approach towards platform work and allow for comparison between the three cases, I subsequently explored which codes were prevalent in which cities. For instance, matrix coding unveiled the interactive policy approach to labour market challenges by Milan’s city government compared to the remaining two cases, or concerns about sustaining livelihoods in policy papers from San Francisco. The analysis then considered through what phrases and expressions, and in which connections, platform work was referred

to. Insights from the qualitative documentary analysis on San Francisco, Milan, and Madrid will be presented in the relevant case studies (Chapters 5-7).

4.3.3.2 *Limitations of documentary analysis*

Mason (2002: 108) warned that documents alone do not count as “hard evidence” in qualitative research. On one hand, the limitation is due to the purpose the authors of a document wish to achieve. One might add to this criticism that texts are produced at specific points in time, thus their value for explaining phenomena across time may be limited. Consequently, it should be considered how documents are produced, consumed, and presented (Owen, 2014: 10) instead of treating them as factually accurate representation of reality consistently valid over time. On the other hand, documents are one potential data source of many and should be triangulated – referring to the process of triangulation explained earlier – to provide “evidence that breeds credibility”, in Eisner’s (1991: 110) words. In order to aspire after triangulation, but also to gain deeper understanding of the policy processes in the three cities, the documentary analysis merely formed the prelude to two rounds of semi-structured interviews and their subsequent transcription and coding.

In the context of ensuring credibility, it should also be noted that documentary analysis can suffer from selectivity bias (Bowen, 2009: 31) due to my role in picking sources for further examination. Even if texts are treated carefully and with attention to their context and purpose, the preceding selection of certain documents could result in a sample that reflects only one particular or narrow view. Therefore, Finlay (2002: 536) advocated for a high degree of reflexivity in all research stages, from sampling to data collection and discussion of findings. Aware of a potential selectivity bias, I gathered documents from several sources within a city, including papers from municipal departments as well as other non-state entities, where possible to capture different views on the policies. To reiterate, documentary analysis served to identify and examine municipal policies in the three cases, thus laying the groundwork for remote semi-structured interviews with participants in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco. Before turning to the technical and methodological choices in interviewing, it will first be briefly discussed on what basis I made the choice of interview participants for each case.

4.3.4 Phase 4: Remote semi-structured interviews

Building on the preliminary documentary analysis, the use of qualitative interviews, a common method in policy analysis (Browne et al., 2018), pursued the objective of exploring the MLG indicators which account for the influences on the respective policies. Interviews moreover served to triangulate data generated from policy papers. Two interview rounds with a total of 19 participants in 15 synchronous and 2 asynchronous interviews sought to enlighten the determinants of platform work governance in the three cases of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco. According to Patton et al. (2013: 89), interviews serve as tools for gathering “policy information”. Yet, considering my ontological position that reality does not exist independently but is constituted by human interaction, the focus on information gathering seems too narrow and insufficient. Rather, Bernardi et al.’s (2018: 34) view of interviews as devices that “enhance understanding” points into the right direction. Keeping research aims and ontology in mind, Meyer’s (2001: 342) view that interviews are not necessarily factual but help “assess perceptions and reactions” appears the most appropriate description of what the method of interviews sought to achieve.

This rationale also explains my choice of interviews over other methods, such as surveys or questionnaires. The unit of analysis – municipal policy – and its determinants are of such complex nature which could not be fully captured by a predetermined set of questions alone. When it comes to questions of interaction and agency, participants might be reluctant to give an insightful account in surveys when relationships with other stakeholders are difficult or delicate. Interviews, particularly when they are more flexible and semi-structured, are better suited to let interviewees “articulate their views”, according to Harvey (2011: 434), and give more nuanced answers that provide deeper understanding. They also allow for detecting non-verbal cues or requesting clarification from the participants in contrast to other qualitative methods.

4.3.4.1 *Selection and recruitment of interview participants*

Apart from the larger rationale to answer RQs 1, 2 and 3 on the nature and determinants of municipal responses to platform work, the selection of interview participants was informed by the choice of cases. Since the two interview rounds pursued slightly different objectives,

the composition of each round was distinct. A complete list of interview participants can be found in Appendix D. The first round aimed to explore the national contexts regarding platform work, such as the prospect or existence of adequate legal regulation, as well as economic and political circumstances of the three cities. Therefore, I reached out to academics and experts from thinktanks to provide an introduction to size, composition, and ongoing debates of the platform economy in the three cases. Each interviewee had previously studied diverse effects of digitalisation on cities, and many of the participants were local residents, promising insights into the respective urban contexts. For instance, participants of the first round included an associate professor on freelance and gig work based in Milan, a researcher on unionisation of workers in atypical work arrangements in Madrid, and an assistant professor on precarious labour in San Francisco. Due to their local and professional expertise, they could moreover be expected to be able to refer me to relevant stakeholders for the subsequent interview round. Overall, eight interviewees participated during the initial round.

For the second round, the selection of interviewees was geared at identifying individuals who could speak to the governance of platform work in the three cities. These local stakeholders included above all officials of the respective municipal offices for social affairs and workforce development, officials of higher governmental offices including regional departments for labour affairs, representatives of platform workers, as well as representatives and policy managers of locally present platform companies or their interest groups. For example, participants ranged from workforce development officers on both city and state-level in San Francisco, to a member of Madrid's regional government, and a representative of a local platform workers' union in Milan. In total, eleven participants were interviewed during round two.

I identified participants in several ways. In the initial round, the choice of participants was informed by relevant papers they had published or in which they had been cited by other scholars. The studies identified during the literature review offered a solid base for that purpose. In the subsequent round, interviewees were selected based on their potential insights into local governance processes of app-based work, or if recommended by previous participants. The policy papers examined during documentary analysis proved especially useful in finding relevant municipal offices and officials. Recruitment of participants progressed in several steps. Once participants had responded to an initial interview request

outlining purpose, length, and online format of the interview, date and time were agreed. Subsequently, I sent them a Participant Information Sheet, Privacy Notice, and Consent Form (see Appendix C), as required by the ethics guidelines of Glasgow University's College of Social Sciences. Returning a signed consent form was not necessary for synchronous interviews, as ethical consent was recorded at the start of each interview. For both asynchronous interviews, participants returned a signed consent form.

Recruitment turned out to be more challenging than anticipated, which could have been owed to the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many potential participants did not reply to initial emails, even if earlier participants had provided their contact details and promised to establish contact with me. Reluctance to participate could have been exacerbated by the pandemic's personal and professional tolls on everyone's lives. Interestingly, representatives of platform companies or their local interest groups were particularly reluctant to take part in the research. Their unwillingness was likely due to the sensitivity of the topic, especially considering reports that platforms are eager to lobby policymakers (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, 2022), or due to high demand for interviews from other researchers. For example, in Milan's case, repeated email requests sent to platforms' interest group AssoDelivery remained unanswered. In Madrid, a previous participant asked managers at a platform company about their interest in participating, alas they did not want to speak to the issue of platform work governance and their relationship with Spanish governmental authorities. And in San Francisco, one platform company replied that the position of public policy manager responsible for the Bay Area would be temporarily vacant, hence being unable to agree to an interview. Data obtained from other participants and secondary sources filled the void left by the absence of platform representatives. Appendix D includes a list of all individuals contacted during recruitment but who declined to participate or did not respond to initial emails.

Consequently, the total number of interview participants amounted to 19, although I conducted 17 interviews. This is because two synchronous interviews saw the participation of two interviewees in each. During one interview on Milan, one participant's colleague was present to support translation between Italian and English, while in Madrid's case, two members of a municipal department took part in the same interview. On both occasions, I asked all participants for their consent, following the procedure described above. In a similar study exploring the role of unions in precarious sectors in Spain and Italy, Pulignano et al.

(2016) interviewed 34 participants. Conscious of the lower number in the present study, I deliberately conducted a documentary analysis and included additional secondary sources in the case studies for data triangulation. Examples of secondary sources ranged from publications of platforms' interest groups, such as Adigital (2019, 2020) or SF.citi (2022), to annual reports or letters to shareholders by platforms (Just Eat Takeaway, 2020; Uber Technologies Inc., 2020; Glovo, 2020). Documentary analysis also helped to ensure data saturation, or put differently, that data collection produced sufficient primary data to competently answer all three research questions.

Notably, some of the participants could be considered elite interviewees, or “key decision-makers” (Engeli et al., 2014: 170), due to their privileged positions in respective municipal or regional governments. For instance, one participant based in Milan was the Municipal Councillor responsible for Labour Policies and Economic Development, who provided an in-depth account of the municipality's engagement with platform workers and platform companies. Meanwhile, the Deputy Minister for Employment and Labour Affairs of Madrid's regional administration was uniquely placed to give insights into the dynamics between various governmental levels regarding platform work in Spain. In San Francisco, the city government's Chief Economist enlightened the special position of platform companies in urban governance processes. The quality of elite interviews can potentially suffer from participants' time pressure, their reluctance to answer questions they deem sensitive, or their preference to speak off the record (Richards, 1996; Harvey, 2011). However, such issues did not emerge in the present research and all participants replied openly and at length. Overall, high-profile interview partners further contributed to the richness, depth, and saturation of primary data gathered on the three cities.

4.3.4.2 *Structure and content of interviews*

I conducted all interviews remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the potential harm to all persons involved in this data collection stage. Of the 17 interviews held, 15 were synchronous and semi-structured interviews, meaning that answers were given immediately following a question, as in a face-to-face conversation. Using the online conferencing software Zoom, I proceeded with two interview rounds covering topics based on the four MLG indicators. The questions identified in Table 2 (Chapter 3) served as basis for the

choice of interview questions. The first round was centred on the city's role in debates surrounding platform work, the national context, and the institutional structures of app-based work governance. Thus, I asked some of the following questions: what is the extent of precarious work in the respective cities? How has the growth of platform work contributed to it? How have the respective municipal governments approached the emergence of platform companies and platform work? How have cities dealt with the tensions between allowing the operation of digital platforms and the welfare of their workers? If applicable, why and to what extent have the municipalities taken a different approach to app-based work than their respective regional or national governments, and what is their relationship with other administrative levels? Which actor or entity exerts the most influence on the municipal governance of platform work, and with what objective? Who are the main decision-makers in relevant processes within the municipality? Regarding the contemporary context at the time, I furthermore inquired about indications that the Covid-19 pandemic affected the municipal response towards platform work.

The second and more extensive round turned to the three cities' specific policies and investigated how, why, and to what effect they have come into being, paying particular attention to the roles of municipal and non-state stakeholders in local governance processes. First, interviews with policymakers evolved around the following questions: how do they define precarious work, and is it a challenge for their municipalities? Are they concerned about platform work? Why did they initiate certain policies, and, if applicable, why did they diverge from the approaches taken by the regional or national governments? What is their perception of the size and urgency of platform work in their cities? Whom do they consider responsible for tackling the phenomenon? What instruments does the municipality hold for managing the spread of app-based work and the subsequent growth of precarious jobs? Addressing the issue of agency in policymaking, I moreover asked to what extent workers' representatives, platform companies, or thinktanks were consulted in policy-making processes. Finally, how did Covid-19 affect their policy priorities more broadly and their response to app-based work specifically? In some interviews, questions also asked about certain elements or proposals found during documentary analysis of policy papers.

Second, themes for the interviews with representatives of platform workers covered the contribution of participants in the formulation and implementation of policies. To what extent were they involved in the policymaking process, and at what stages, for instance

formulation, decision, implementation, or evaluation? What were their suggestions regarding the current policy, and which steps could be taken by the municipal government to improve the conditions of platform workers? How would they describe the municipality's policy towards platform work, and how would they evaluate it? How does their engagement with platform companies look like? Do they collaborate with similar unions or collectives in other cities and learn from their experiences within the respective policy processes? Do they engage on any other governmental levels, and with what degree of success? Appendix D includes the complete lists of questions that formed the starting point for semi-structured interviews in both interview rounds.

The structure of my questions was influenced by Owen's (2014) recommendations of a three-layer approach, consisting of main questions, follow-up questions, and probes. While the former introduced a topic, the latter two served to achieve "depth, detail, vividness, richness, and nuance" (ibid.: 9) by encouraging participants to articulate their viewpoints. In both rounds, questions diverged slightly not only between interviewees for the diverse cities but also between their respective sectors and professions. For instance, I asked policymakers in different departments, though part of the same municipality, somewhat different questions depending on their roles. Importantly, I conducted semi-structured interviews, allowing for divergences from a predetermined set of questions and for spontaneous follow-up questions.

All synchronous interviews followed the same procedure. First, I welcomed the participant, reiterated purpose and expected length of the interview, and summarised the key points of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (Appendix C) shared in advance. Importantly, I emphasised that their participation was voluntary and they could stop it at any point without providing a reason. Furthermore, I reiterated that anonymity might not be fully guaranteed as location or job position could reveal participants' identities. Second, I started to record the Zoom meeting and asked interviewees to confirm they wish to participate after having considered the ethical implications, hence recording their consent. The interview then proceeded with semi-structured questions, as outlined above. At the end, I thanked interviewees for their participation, stopped the recording, and asked if they had any further questions on how their data would be used in the research or in future publications. Immediately following each interview, I took notes summarising the conversation's main points and outstanding issues that would require further attention in future interviews. In addition to 15 online interviews, two asynchronous interviews took place. They consisted of

written answers to interview questions I had previously emailed them. Participants of asynchronous interviews preferred that format due to their busy schedule and the inability to attend a synchronous interview in one case, and doubts about their English language skills in another. Nonetheless, asynchronous interview provided the same rich insights as the remaining synchronous ones.

Lastly, in debates surrounding the platform economy, terms are often used interchangeably even if they refer to similar though not identical concepts. For example, platform work is often called gig work, although they are not strictly the same. That issue could be even more relevant when interviewing non-native English speakers, who might translate words directly from their mother tongue into English and thus use different terms to the ones common in English. To mitigate such issues and ensure conceptual clarity across interviews, follow-up questions during synchronous interviews allowed to clarify what participants meant by using certain terms. During one interview on San Francisco, for instance, my follow-up question led to the important clarification that municipal officials, who consider “gigs” positive outcome for jobseekers, include platform work in that concept. Neither one of the two asynchronous interviews required follow-up emails for clarification.

4.3.4.3 Computer-assisted transcription and coding

Similar to the principles guiding documentary analysis outlined earlier, I had to transcribe and code audio-recordings of interviews in order to elicit meaning from them. Using the automatic audio-recording function of Zoom, and Trint transcription software, I produced a verbatim transcript for each synchronous interview. In addition to the audio recording, I followed King et al.’s (2010: 47) advice and took notes during interviews to complement the transcripts with remarks on non-verbal cues, a change in voice, or anything that might express opinion or sentiment non-verbally. Neither of the two asynchronous interviews required transcription, and they were uploaded directly to NVivo for data analysis. Some of Trint’s transcripts necessitated proofreading, however, as the software was at times unable to identify certain words or phrases by participants in Milan and Madrid. In those cases, I listened to the recordings while reading and editing the texts, ensuring transcripts’ accuracy.

To approach the process of coding via NVivo in an organised manner, I followed Saldaña's (2013) advice and coded in two cycles with both inductive and deductive elements. In a first reading, I employed inductive coding and let the codes emerge from the transcript. A second reading during the first cycle then served to establish "pattern codes" (Miles et al., 2004: 86) from these early codes. Pattern coding refers to the process of summarising codes into categories, for example processes, descriptors, or emotions. This step seemed important particularly with a view to comparing experiences, or categories, between different interviews and cities. For instance, pattern codes could enlighten whether similar concerns regarding the growth of platform work emerged in interviews on all three cases, and if so, among which group of interview participants. Inductive coding also served to ensure that data analysis would take account of issues, debates, or trends hidden in the transcripts that might not have been captured by the deductive cycle, as described in the following.

The second and more focused cycle adopted a deductive approach, as coding was supposed to unveil information on the four MLG indicators, and thus on the determinants of municipal responses to app-based work: the roles of non-state actors, governmental distribution of competences, available municipal policy instruments, and involvement of the city governments in platform work governance. During that cycle, I identified new codes pertaining to above MLG indicators in the transcripts, while merging some codes from the first coding round with new ones. Similar to the first coding cycle, transcripts underwent several readings.

I subsequently added inductive and deductive codes from both coding cycles to the codes from documentary analysis and structured them by case to combine the insights from different interviews and shed light on each case. NVivo's coding tree function helped to visualise various "themes and subthemes" (King et al., 2010: 150) for Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco, respectively. By creating tree diagrams for each case (see examples in Appendix E), I combined codes under various themes or structured them into subthemes. These diagrams furthermore facilitated a structured approach to analysing and drafting the three case studies. Moreover, NVivo allowed for easy comparison of codes between cases: for instance, double clicking on the code for 'distribution of competences across governmental levels' revealed all relevant references from interview transcripts and policy papers on all three cases, highlighting their commonalities. Results of coding and data analysis can be found in the substantial case studies in Chapters 5-8, whereas the discussion

(Chapter 9) will elaborate on cases' parallels and variations, and the implications for theories on platform work governance, in greater detail.

4.3.4.4 *Ethics of online interviews*

Although interviews are among the most established research methods of the social sciences and in the field of policy analysis, they raise a number of ethical concerns which necessitate critical reflection on a researcher's role in leading the interviews and hence in generating data. Above all, a researcher should be aware of the "interviewer effect" (Breen, 2006: 473), or how one's personal attitudes, views, or presumptions may have influenced the interview's conduct and consequently participants' responses. Several measures served to minimise the interviewer effect. First, during interview preparation, I avoided the formulation of leading questions and instead focused on phrasing open-ended questions. Second, follow-up questions and giving participants time to elaborate on their responses ensured that they could clarify their positions. Third, data triangulation during interview analysis once more fulfilled an important role as it provided further evidence and explanation to participants' statements.

The pandemic and the necessary methodological changes raised some additional ethical issues. Brennan et al. (1988) observed that interviewing usually represents a stressful experience for everyone involved, participants and interviewer alike, but the increased general level of anxiety due to Covid-19 demanded that particular care was taken in conducting the interviews. Furthermore, some of the interviewees were not native English speakers and hence might have experienced the process even more stressful. To minimise any mental harm and potential anxiety, I heeded Fox et al.'s (2007) advice for online research by repeatedly offering participants breaks, asking if they were alright, giving them the opportunity to discuss any concerns, paying attention to non-verbal indications of stress, and making sure they wanted to continue the interview.

Moreover, the online approach can pose limits to confidentiality. King et al. (2010: 100) noted that in online interviews "complete anonymity and confidentiality cannot be assured" due to the digital traces participants leave on the internet. I took appropriate steps to mitigate such risk. As recommended by Glasgow University for secure data management, I made use of the University's Zoom subscription for conducting and recording interviews, and deleted

recordings from Zoom immediately after finishing the transcription process and transferring them onto a secure hard drive. In addition, I restricted access to the online conference room by setting a password, so that only the interview participants in question could enter the room. In addition, even though participants are treated as anonymous in the respective case study chapters, their roles and locations could allow conclusions about their identities. I made participants aware of the risks in the Consent Form and at the start of each interview.

Overall, I felt confident with the choice of Zoom for remote data collection for several reasons. Crucially, the software has become a standard tool for communication and conferencing particularly among professionals and academics, target groups of this research, since the outbreak of the pandemic in early 2020. It could thus be expected that participants would feel comfortable using that tool and would not be intimidated by it. Ultimately, making use of Zoom made it considerably easier to gather data from geographically dispersed participants, avoid travel costs for the participants and myself, mitigate the risk of a potential Covid-19 infection, and record conversations. All stages of the interview process as described on the previous pages received the approval of Glasgow University's College of Social Sciences ethics committee prior to the first interview.

4.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been twofold. It has demonstrated how the present research approach fulfils Majchrzak et al.'s (2014) five criteria of robust policy research, and it has shown how qualitative research methods answer all three research questions while capturing the unit of analysis, municipal policy on platform work. Policy analysis within a case study approach serves to unveil and investigate the complex influences on municipal policies, to which the MLG indicators alert. The following chapters will present each case study in turn and analyse the data gathered in San Francisco, Milan, and Madrid through an MLG framework. First, though, a short preface to the three cases and their contexts will show why they represent insightful subjects of inquiry.

4.5 Preface to the case studies

Each of the following chapters will discuss how the respective municipal government has reacted to the growth of platform work and which particular context, captured by the MLG arrangement, has influenced that response. All three cases are at the same time national epicentres of platform work and locations of protests and court cases, mirroring the tensions created by that type of work, as the horizon scan uncovered. San Francisco is the birthplace of many of the world's most well-known platform companies and a testing ground for their business models, such as in the case of Uber. In 2021, the number of ride-hailing drivers alone – excluding other types of platform workers – in the city was estimated to be around 50,000 (San Francisco Chronicle, 2021). Nonetheless, the horizon scan pointed to the municipality's awareness (OEWD, 2017) of a highly polarised urban economy characterised by prosperity and low unemployment as well as precarity and poverty. A crucial factor in San Francisco's platform work sector is Assembly Bill 5, the California-wide law aiming to reclassify independent contractors as employees since early 2020, though major platform companies have successfully gained exemption. Overall, these developments raise questions about how the municipality responds to platform work, and what influences shape its response.

Meanwhile, Milan is widely regarded as Italy's capital of business and innovation (Bernardi et al., 2018). A cooperation agreement between the municipality and Airbnb points towards the city government's willingness to experiment with platform companies, whereas repeated protests of app-based workers in public squares demonstrate the visible discontent of many local workers (Chesta et al., 2019). According to estimates of the city's prefecture in 2021, roughly 66,000 delivery riders are registered with platforms in the city. Furthermore, Milan's city government is situated within a particular national context as other Italian municipalities have actively managed app-based work through agreements with platforms and consultations with workers. Hence, the municipality's pro-innovation spirit amidst weak national legislation on platform work, strong local presence of unions, and initiatives by other city governments offers an interesting case study about the influences behind Milan's management of these factors.

Lastly, Madrid has been the location of repeated protests of platform workers (Forbes, 2019) and the emergence of alternative platform cooperatives run by workers. Despite frequent protests, numbers of app-based workers appear to be lower than in Milan or San Francisco, as estimates from the Spanish business interest group Adigital (2020) indicate. Around

30,000 delivery riders were registered on platforms across the country, though this estimate likely understates the true extent of platform work. This is because the number fails to account for workers on other platforms, and the Covid-19 pandemic has recently fuelled the growth of app-based work in the city (Chapter 8). In fact, Madrid is one of two main centres of app-based work in Spain, alongside Barcelona (Ardura Urquiaga et al., 2019; De La Poza et al., 2020). Moreover, Madrid’s municipality acts against the backdrop of a landmark law, the national Rider Law adopted by the Spanish Parliament in 2021. However, reports (Social Europe, 2021; Hooker et al., 2022) about the law’s difficult enforcement and platforms’ non-compliance suggest ongoing challenges for policymakers and workers’ representatives alike. The combination of local protests and potentially wide-ranging legislative measures, in the context of high unemployment (see Table 6), makes Madrid another promising case study of platform work governance.

Table 6: Diverse economic and platform work contexts in the three cases.

Case	Population size	Unemployment rate	Number of selected platform workers	Main regulatory framework of platform work
1. San Francisco	873,965	2.4%	50,000 ride-hailing workers (2021 estimate)	State Assembly Bill 5
2. Milan	1,386,285	5.9%	66,000 delivery riders (2021 estimate)	National Riders Decree
3. Madrid	3,286,662	10.0%	29,300 delivery riders across Spain (2020 estimate)	National Rider Law

Data sources: San Francisco: US Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, San Francisco Chronicle (2021); Milan: Comune di Milano (2018), ISTAT, Comune di Milano (2022); Madrid: Adigital (2020), Datosmacro, Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2022).

Thus, the horizon scan revealed three cities with dynamic developments and visible tensions in the local platform work sectors. Despite its concentration in these cities, app-based work has emerged in three highly diverse economic and policy contexts. Not only do the cities differ in terms of population size, unemployment rate, number of app-based workers, and regulatory framework of platform work (see Table 6). For example, regulatory frameworks create diverse legal conditions which municipal officials, workers and unions, as well as platform representatives need to navigate, ranging from California’s AB 5 in San Francisco to the nation-wide Rider Law in Madrid’s case. Yet, the cases also differ in their municipal

responses to platform work. Each of the following chapters will draw on four MLG indicators, outlined in Chapter 3, to enlighten the diverse contexts and explain how and why the municipalities have reacted in diverse manners. Insights from the case studies will later inform the contextualised comparison of the three cases (Chapter 9). The analysis will commence with the case of San Francisco.

5. Case study of San Francisco – embracing platform work as income source

San Francisco, “basically the capital of Silicon Valley” according to the city’s Chief Economist (Interview 9), is often seen as synonymous with the digital economy and the expression of cutting-edge innovation in that field. It is the birthplace of some of the world’s most prominent platform companies and hosts many of their headquarters, including Airbnb, Instacart, Lyft, Postmates and Uber. Contrary to the two remaining case studies of Madrid and Milan, the city government (*City and County of San Francisco*) openly embraces platform work. Its department for workforce development considers such work a “positive outcome” for local jobseekers, in the words of a municipal official (Interview 10), despite awareness of the precarious conditions platforms perpetuate. Consequently, limited competences and the struggle between the state of California and platform companies over the legal classification of app-based workers do not affect the scope for action of San Francisco’s City Hall: faced with “massive inequality” (Walker, 2018: n.p.), it assigns a crucial function to platforms as job providers.

Examining the combined effect of the four MLG indicators (1. roles, views, and involvement of non-state actors; 2. relationship between governmental levels regarding platform work; 3. availability of competences and instruments on municipal level; and 4. involvement of the municipality in the policy debate on platform work), the chapter will unpack the influences on the municipal response in four steps. First, it will analyse the city government’s motivations to embrace platform work in the context of widespread poverty and homelessness where any job is considered a remedy. This motivation reflects the tensions between a purported pro-labour spirit among municipal policymakers and the desire to create a welcoming environment for large corporations. According to a municipal official, taking up platform work represents “the easiest way to connect to the labour market and start making money” (Interview 10). Turning to the governmental dynamics, the second section will examine the influence of California’s Assembly Bill 5 (AB 5) from 2020, an ambitious yet ultimately failed attempt to grant app-based workers social entitlements which was undermined by a large-scale campaign by platform companies. The pressure of a growing tech exodus – the relocation of technology companies and venture capitalists to other US metropolitan areas – on San Francisco’s municipal policies will also be evaluated. In a third

step, the influence of platforms, their successful lobbying efforts on city and state levels, and workers' limited role in debates surrounding working conditions will be examined. The fourth section will then discuss the particular power constellation emanating from the above factors, asking whether San Francisco's municipal response to platform work represents a promising strategy for managing the phenomenon or merely reflects the power of tech capitalists over governance processes and regulation.

Overall, this case study will unveil the forces of what some might consider the downside of platform capitalism, namely the propensity of business interests to use financial capital to influence governance processes, create a favourable regulatory environment, and undermine potentially wide-ranging legislation such as AB 5. San Francisco's position at the forefront of digital and technological innovation makes the city and its politics the frontlines of global battlegrounds between competing visions of the urban platform economy where, thus far, platform companies have gained the upper hand. Nonetheless, this is not the only relevant factor. MLG shows how the municipality tries to balance the benefits of hosting a thriving tech sector and its social externalities within the limits of its competences, while state and federal governments continue to oppose the misclassification of workers. In this chapter, it should be noted that the term "state-level" refers to the state of California, unlike in the two remaining cases, and the US national administration here is called the federal government.

5.1 Feeding the golden goose: City Hall's embrace of platform work

As the academic debate around the question of which cities will be the winners and losers of automation and digitalisation continues (Frank et al., 2018; Hilpert, 2021), San Francisco has been – at least so far – the undisputed epicentre of the digital economy. Benefitting from its position as largest city in the Bay Area and the proximity to Silicon Valley, it offers a favourable environment for the experimentation with, and use of, platforms. Yet, that does not necessarily make the city a 'winner' of digitalisation. High living costs and a competitive labour market contrast with poverty and homelessness on an unprecedented scale. Actions of the city government attempt to balance these tensions, on one hand attracting big corporations while upskilling jobseekers on the other. Within that context, platform work is seen as opportunity by officials of the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD), San Francisco's municipal department responsible for setting local labour policy.

As such, platforms perform an important function in the municipal labour strategy. Yet, City Hall is not a passive bystander in the platform economy: activities of platforms are subject to municipal regulation, though not in terms of work, where city competences are restricted. Later sections will evaluate how this response favours the interests of platform companies at the expense of workers.

5.1.1 Platform work as welcome remedy

The response of San Francisco's city government to app-based work is characterised by a distinctly open and permissive approach. First, platform work, and its influence in perpetuating precarity, are not seen as problematic by the municipality, as San Francisco's Chief Economist – an official within the municipality's Office for Economic Analysis (OEA) – explained: “are we worried that [...] people [...] are sliding into casual employment? The answer is no, because our economy is too hot” (Interview 9). It is “hot” in the sense that unemployment is low and its attractiveness to high-skilled workers is high. The interview participant further elaborated that, “the formal labour market [has been] growing so fast they sucked all the people out who didn't want to be in the informal sector” (Interview 9), justifying the assumption that low-income workers in precarious working arrangements, like platform work, would be able to find regular employment if they wanted.

Going further than simply regarding platform work as not problematic, the municipal department OEWD has begun to recognise “gigs” as “positive outcome” that supports local residents in making ends meet, OEWD's representative explained (Interview 10). Although the term gig can refer to time-limited jobs of various skills or pay ranges, the interviewee clarified that his department considers platform work one category of gigs: “when we say gig, [...] there's a lot of [...] types of gigs that are captured under that umbrella, Uber and Deliveroo, you know, delivery [...] that's all a part of this” (Interview 10). As the next sections will show, the municipality recognises platform work both as solution to the social challenges created by the competitive local economy and as welcome expression of the city's innovative image which it seeks to promote.

The municipality's main motivation for viewing platform work as a positive outcome results from the need to tackle rampant poverty and homelessness. San Francisco's proximity to Silicon Valley, its tech-driven economy, and the prevailing entrepreneurial spirit provide fertile soil for platform work and other precarious jobs. This uniquely innovative environment has become both a blessing and a curse. According to one researcher on A.I. and automation, "San Francisco highlights [...] the duality of the A.I. economy" (Interview 2), generating both benefits and challenges for municipal policymakers. Describing the state of the urban economy before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Chief Economist pointed out that, "it's one of the two healthiest city economies in the United States [...] measured by raw GDP and employment growth, and the unemployment rate is extremely low. Labour force participation is extremely high" (Interview 9). In fact, the pre-pandemic unemployment rate averaged 2% across 2019 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The "golden goose" (Interview 9), as the Chief Economist referred to the city's growing tech sector, provides the urban economy with a growing tax base and attracts highly skilled, well-paid workers that contribute the necessary human and capital resources to foster the city's world-leading role in innovation.

Such high labour force participation rates, or the large quantity of urban residents in jobs, does not match the quality of jobs, however, since many sections of the city's labour market are marked by precarious conditions. These can be found across a range of professional sectors, a researcher on precarity in San Francisco (Interview 4) observed:

"the extent of precarious work is very, very widespread [and concerns] a really wide range of both very, very privileged work, so the work that people working for digital media firms are doing [...] in a similar way to the work that an Uber driver or somebody [...] whose work is at the kind of lower [end of the labour market]."

The growth of platform work, thus, does not represent the root cause of precarity in the city. The researcher on local precarity explained that, "there's like sort of structural forces that compound with the newness of [...] digital technologies and have facilitated the production of this problem" (Interview 4). He pointed to the existence of casual, irregular types of work prior to the arrival of platforms, and the effect of digital tools – including mobile apps and algorithms – on perpetuating precarity through new channels. Sharing his personal impression, the Chief Economist corroborated the researcher's statement: "I had been studying or aware of this sort of casualisation since I was in grad school. So this sort of rebranding of it as the gig economy in the last few years strikes me as just, OK, [...] now

there's another reason to talk about it” (Interview 9). In other words, platform urbanism can be seen as continuation of pre-existing types of precarious jobs, as it is indeed regarded by a key municipal official, the Chief Economist.

San Francisco experiences a particularly high number of platform workers compared to other cities, because the city both hosts platforms’ headquarters and is seen as testing ground for their products. Concrete data on the number of workers is difficult to obtain (Egan, 2016), but the local ridesharing sector alone is estimated to include more than 50,000 workers (San Francisco Chronicle, 2021). “San Francisco is an early test case for a lot of these platforms. [...] Their user base is disproportionately in San Francisco because that's where they started”, the Chief Economist underlined (Interview 9), referring to the likes of Uber, Instacart or Postmates on one side, and to strong local demand for their services on the other. This unique position at the forefront of innovation in the digital and platform economy puts the city at the centre of attention of interest groups and state regulators alike, sections 5.2 and 5.3 will show.

Table 7: Selected economic indices of San Francisco.

Economic index	Value
Unemployment rate (2019)	2.4%
Median household income (2017-2021)	\$126,187
Median gross rent per month (2017-2021)	\$2,130
Population (2020)	873,965
Number of residents experiencing homelessness (2019)	8,035

Data sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), US Census Bureau.

5.1.2 Mitigating externalities of the golden goose

However, the “golden goose” has come home to roost. Its growth has incurred considerable costs for local residents and created policy challenges for City Hall. A representative of the California Workforce Association (CWA) – representing municipal workforce boards on state level – described the situation as follows: “San Francisco, I think, is really unique in the sense that there is both an extremely prosperous and dominant labour market in the tech industry that also has low levels of access and ability for people who are coming from within

the market to penetrate” (Interview 15). In other words, the attractiveness and benefits of a competitive and innovative urban economy are not evenly spread and in fact unattainable for large parts of the working population. As the researcher on precarity in San Francisco critically remarked, “we can exploit more workers and the rich people will get richer, which is broadly what is happening in San Francisco” (Interview 4). Such inequality has manifested itself in high rates of poverty and the “big homelessness problem” (Interview 9), in the Chief Economist’s words, due to exorbitant living costs. According to official estimates, more than 8,000 residents experience homelessness, while median monthly rent exceeds \$2,100 (see Table 7). He further argued that the outflow of poorer residents epitomised many of these local challenges: “the exodus of low income people from San Francisco [is] the main way that our shortcomings as a city economy are manifested” (Interview 9). This phenomenon would also concern some platform workers who work in the city but are forced to live elsewhere: “we do have a zillion Uber drivers. Most of them don't live in San Francisco [...] But there they are driving for Uber, many times driving great distances just to get to San Francisco to work” (Interview 9).

Thus, while access to many high-paid, high-skilled jobs in the city’s tech sectors can prove challenging to San Francisco’s residents – excluding them from large parts of the urban labour market – platforms offer low-barrier entry. According to OEWD’s representative, “driving for Uber [is] the easiest way to connect to the labour market and start making money” (Interview 10). Officials in OEWD thus believe that platform work alleviates the pressure from high living costs, supports residents to be self-sufficient, and paves the way into regular employment. Gigs, though running counter the municipal strategy of promoting “good paying jobs” (OEWD, 2019: 3), are supposed to eventually open other work opportunities. OEWD’s representative clarified that,

“we know that it's just a stepping stone. Right. And so we are now, I don't know if we're encouraging people to place their students into gigs, but if it's aligned with the end goal of that jobseeker, which is I need money now, I need to gain some work experience, I'm still working with this non-profit on finding a career, like position, [...] we will at least recognise it” (Interview 10).

OEWD would prefer jobseekers to engage in gigs that “provide work experience and something that you can put on a resume and transferable skills” (Interview 10). However, the particular social and economic exigencies of San Francisco have necessitated the positive recognition of platform work, as OEWD’s official explained: “we shifted our policy to say,

you know what, as long as the person is working this gig to provide supplemental income while they're working on training or [...] for whatever other reasons, we will recognise that as a positive outcome” (Interview 10). During the pandemic (Chapter 8), the steep rise in unemployment, poverty, and homelessness reinforced the municipal view of platform work as something to be welcomed, allowing unemployed residents to make ends meet during dire economic conditions. OEWD’s official confirmed during the interview in early 2021, while the city was under strict lockdown measures, that, “right now, I think it's important that we see [...] any win as a win” (Interview 10).

Beyond recognising platform work, OEWD actively tries to support jobseekers interested in pursuing such opportunities. This willingness to help them navigate the platform economy can be seen as indication of the awareness among municipal officials that app-based workers often face unexpected administrative or financial burdens. One example is tax payments, as the interview participant from OEWD stressed: “every year more and more people show up to do their taxes, had no idea how much money they were supposed to save. And they get slapped with this huge bill” (Interview 10). The municipal department would like to “prepare our folks for this future [and] help people assess whether or not independent work is good for them and then identify which types of gigs are appropriate”, in order to ultimately “have [them] do it right and continue working on the bigger and better career goal” (Interview 10). One formal mechanism put in place on the city level to help workers with these issues consisted of OEWD’s cooperation with Samaschool, a social enterprise that trains jobseekers, in 2017. It aimed to help jobseekers gain transferable skills through “independent work” opportunities, including gigs (Samaschool, 2017: n.p.). Section 5.3.1 will moreover discuss municipal attempts to extend healthcare to platform workers, namely through the so-called “City Option” to which all companies operating in San Francisco have to contribute. However, some platforms have failed to comply with the measure.

5.1.3 Steering the broader platform economy

The City Option also serves as example of the city government being willing to intervene in the platform economy, yet mostly relating to externalities other than precarious work conditions, including pollution, congestion, and rising rents. Concerning the municipal approach to platforms, City Hall tends to take a permissive approach of adaptation rather

than outright prohibition of related activities: “given the sort of division and the nature of federalism in the United States, is that [if] you're stuck with it [...] you have to adapt to it” (Interview 9). This quote by the Chief Economist both shows how the lack of competences on municipal level precludes greater scope for regulation, discussed further below, but it also hints at the fact that some adaptation, or action, is required by the city government. Indeed, City Hall’s approach to platforms is more nuanced than simply leaving the platform economy entirely unregulated. Compared to other US cities, San Francisco’s municipality is neither as permissive as Washington DC nor as restrictive as Austin, a previous study (Pilaar, 2018) found. An international analysis of different municipal policies on platforms (Sharing Cities Action, 2019: 40) moreover concluded that while San Francisco’s City Hall “prefers not to intervene unless necessary”, it takes an active role in managing the local platform economy. Such role also emerged in the documentary analysis, which revealed a combination of policy tools employed by the city government: on the platform economy, City Hall employs informative, interactive, and proactive instruments, following Mercier et al.’s (2016: 95) classification. In other words, it conducts research on the role of platforms in the local labour market – for example through the collaboration with the thinktank IFTF (IFTF, 2015) – it consults with stakeholders through OEWD’s steering committee discussed in Section 5.3, and it reverts to regulation, even if to limited extent.

The examples of Airbnb and ride-sourcing companies like Uber highlight that the city government is willing to regulate platforms and the services they offer when it holds the policy tools to do so. City Hall’s stance towards Airbnb is both the result of specific concerns as well as municipal competences allowing to respond to such concerns. Regarding the concerns surrounding the platform economy, the Chief Economist described the motivations behind local regulation of platforms as follows: “the objections to the platforms are not about workers” (Interview 9). Instead, objections are raised about how platforms “are taking housing units off the market and driving up housing costs, they are causing traffic by putting tourists where they're not supposed to be” (Interview 9). The academic literature (Ardura Urquiaga et al., 2019; Aguilera et al., 2019) found this to be a common concern among many municipal governments. Regarding the role of competences, San Francisco’s municipality holds some regulatory tools to guide the operations of platforms. For example, City Hall introduced a “congestion tax” on ride-sharing services, yet, again, its introduction was motivated by concerns about the number of Uber and Lyft cars on San Francisco’s roads, not the working conditions on the respective platforms. The Chief Economist reported that

“the city complains that Uber drivers cause more congestion than other types of vehicles and [...] they're kind of a nuisance in that respect” (Interview 9). That would be because, “the city now has forty thousand more cars driving around, mostly empty” (Interview 9). While pollution, congestion, and increased urban density are not primary concerns of the present analysis, they will feature in a section further below (Section 5.2.3) which investigates why the decision of some companies to relocate from San Francisco to other US cities may put pressure on City Hall to adopt a more welcoming position towards platforms.

The more lenient approach towards platforms relying on large pools of workers is not necessarily the result of political priorities but of a lack of competences in labour affairs, as the Chief Economist further explained. He pointed out that, “the city would like to take a harder line at platforms, some of these reasons are reasonable, some of them are political, some you can't tell the difference. But we're largely precluded by state law” (Interview 9). On one hand, the quote pointed to the influential role of the State of California, holding respective competences and leading the discussion on classifying platform workers as employees: “ways to improve the quality of work for gig workers, that debate happens at the state level” (Interview 9). Section 5.2 will return to a more detailed analysis of the state’s considerable influence on San Francisco’s platform work and the role of platforms in undermining California-wide worker protection. On the other hand, his statement highlighted the desire for greater intervention among municipal officials. This desire is reflected in municipal documents: for example, commenting on the settlement reached with DoorDash after the company had failed to comply with the City Option, an official of the City Attorney’s office remarked that, “San Francisco has long led the country in worker protections”, and that, “companies cannot exploit our workers for profit” (City Attorney of San Francisco, 2021: n.p.). It should be noted, though, that one cannot make generalisations about the municipality’s attitudes either for or against workers’ rights. In fact, the following section will show that City Hall walks a fine line between attracting innovative companies and supporting workers’ causes, and city officials attempt to balance these two interests.

5.1.4 Pro-labour or pro-capital? Balancing conflicting municipal agendas

As just pointed out, officials of San Francisco’s municipality watch the impact of platforms on the local economy with ambiguity. Such ambiguity comes to the fore in OEWD’s own

institutional structure and objectives. Interviews revealed that the city government views platforms and platform work as reflections of San Francisco's innovative, entrepreneurial culture. OEWD's official pointed out that, "it's good for the economy to have these billion dollar organisations downtown" (Interview 10). This impression has been reflected in previous studies as well. In their analysis of platform urbanism in San Francisco, Flores et al. (2017: 3757) found that the "key factor" for supporting the likes of Uber or InstaCart consists of the "consensus among the city's political class" to create a "welcoming environment for new technology companies for San Francisco's prosperity." Platform companies play a role in fostering such view by underlining their contributions to their local economy in the public discourse through dedicated interest groups, later sections will demonstrate.

Still, views of platform work among city officials are more diverse than Flores et al.'s (2017) study may suggest. For example, officials are aware of the trade-off between attracting leading companies of the digital economy and defending the interests of workers. This awareness, but also its view of platform work as stepping stone and expression of innovation, is the result of OEWD's own two-fold institutional structure: the department's agenda includes steering workforce development as well as attracting businesses: "half of our shop is really more focussed on keeping these big companies strong" (Interview 10). OEWD's representative further explained that, "it's a fine line we walk because on one side of our house, we're looking at [...] attracting big companies like Uber and Postmates, right. [...] And then on the other side of our work, we have, you know, the best interests of our residents and the jobseekers and gig workers at hand" (Interview 10). This sympathy for the vulnerable conditions of workers does not necessarily imply that the city government is a staunch supporter of workers' rights. A more critical study (Lopez, 2020: 1) of City Hall's social policies argued that the city's precarious workers are governed by a combination of "compassion and brutality", meaning that the "urban precariat" is excluded from enjoying the benefits of city-provided healthcare or minimum wage. Instead, their poverty and homelessness largely go unaddressed. This position was supported by the researcher on precarity, who expressed scepticism towards San Francisco's perception as labour-friendly, and thus implied that a pro-business ideology would dominate policymaking in the city: "there is a prevailing view of San Francisco [...] as being part of the so-called progressive left in the US, [...] but obviously in terms of labour law, that's very much not the case" (Interview 4).

Both ideologies are present, and at times clash, in San Francisco. According to the Chief Economist, these two ideologies create tensions or a “sort of collision of the freewheeling Silicon Valley business and labour and work culture with sort of San Francisco's kind of very traditional work [or] rural mentality” (Interview 9). These seemingly contradictory worldviews also influence municipal policies, including City Hall’s response to platform work, as became visible earlier: the city government does not conform to a purely non-interventionist approach to policymaking, as some platform companies might wish, but does choose to regulate, though rarely concerning the precarity of workers. Its stance on platform urbanism both reflect the pro-innovation ideology and a concern about the social challenges a high-skilled labour market can create. In the Chief Economist’s words, the municipality tries to fulfil both business- and labour-sympathetic aspirations, allowing the continuation of innovative business practices while tapping into the profits of companies to fund municipal support programmes for local residents and workers, such as the City Option: “we let that happen and then we tax the billionaires. We don't tax them enough so that no one ever wants to do it again. But we tax them [...] And the process continues. And we [...] find a way to fund necessary things” (Interview 9).

Overall, the decision of San Francisco’s city government to recognise, embrace, and support the use of platform work stems not only a pro-innovation mindset but above all from a preoccupation about poverty and homelessness, exacerbated by a highly productive yet unequal local economy. It ultimately represents City Hall’s attempt to manage the social and economic tensions created by the “golden goose” in the face of limited municipal competences pertaining to platform work. As an earlier quote indicated, “the quality of work for gig workers, that debate happens at the state level” (Interview 9). Alas, California-wide measures have been undermined by platforms, it will be argued next.

5.2 California versus capitalists, or: the failure to protect workers

Conditions of San Francisco’s platform workers could be improved by progressive Assembly Bill 5 (AB 5) tabled and passed by California’s state government in 2019, at least theoretically. Plans to classify app-based workers as employees and grant them related benefits have met fierce resistance by the largest platforms, as Section 5.3 will show as well.

In the absence of state-level progress, the US federal government has shown intentions of supporting workers' cause, yet thus far, corporate interests of platforms have prevailed. The relocation of some tech companies to other US cities further increases pressure on San Francisco's City Hall to create a welcoming – in the sense of pro-business and low-regulation – environment for platforms.

Table 8: Roles of governmental levels in San Francisco's platform work governance (MLG indicator 2).

Governmental level	Key departments or officials	Role in platform work governance
Federal	US Department of Labor	No legislative competence, yet urging California state government to act against exemptions of platforms from AB 5
State	California state government	State-wide Assembly Bill 5 (AB 5) classifying independent contractors on platforms as employees passed in 2019 and entered into force in 2020
Municipal	Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD)	Recognising platform work as positive outcome for jobseekers; consulting with workers' and platform companies' representatives through OEWD's steering committee

5.2.1 From AB 5 to Prop 22 and back

One of the most fundamental actors in San Francisco's platform economy, and a role model for regulators of platforms around the world, is California's state government (see Table 8). Its influence stems from the competences in labour law, San Francisco's Chief Economist stressed: "reforms that might be popular in San Francisco are precluded by state law and the state of California is responsible for deciding, for example, who's a contractor and who's an employee, what type of work has to be considered formal" (Interview 9), though City Hall does hold certain competences, for example concerning the minimum wage (OLSE, 2020a). The state government's exemplary role for other regulators is mostly due to its legislative efforts that resulted in Assembly Bill 5 (AB 5), classifying platform workers as employees and thus entitling them to employment-related benefits, such as holiday pay, sick leave, or unemployment insurance. However, legal uncertainties persist due to successful opposition

from major platform companies and subsequent pushback against platforms by the State, leaving workers in continuous vulnerability and insecurity.

Following the so-called Dynamex ruling, in which a Californian court found that platform workers were wrongly classified as self-employed independent contractors, California's state legislature responded by passing AB 5 in 2019. The bill practically held that platform workers ought to be treated as employees, and was supported by not only San Francisco's OEWD (Interview 10) but also the largest platform worker communities Jobs With Justice, Gig Workers Rising, and We Drive Progress (Jobs With Justice SF, 2022). However, major platforms opposed the legal changes and in November 2020 successfully tabled Proposition 22 (Prop 22), a state-wide referendum on the question of whether app-based transportation and delivery workers are to be considered independent contractors. Following a USD 200.-million campaign primarily financed by Uber, Lyft and DoorDash, 59% of voters voted in favour of Prop 22 (Bloomberg Law, 2021). "Proposition 22 successfully created some exemptions and some carve outs for certain gig economy companies and certain kinds of occupations", CWA's official stated (Interview 15), and San Francisco's Chief Economist summarised that these platforms basically "revert back to the status quo" (Interview 9). They therefore continue to make use of the independent contractor classification, avoiding the provision of social benefits to their workforces.

Despite certain platforms' success in being exempted from AB 5, the debate around which platform workers are classified as employees is still ongoing. On one hand, California's state government is seeking to enforce the bill, though so far without any implications for platform workers in San Francisco. "There's still elements of it that can be enforced, and I haven't seen any of that, you know, roll out in San Francisco. I think at the state level, they're still trying to determine how and when and where they can apply some of those remaining laws", OEWD's employee reported (Interview 10). In fact, California's Attorney General sued Uber and Lyft for misclassification of their workers (Superior Court of the State of California, 2020), while a separate court ruling (Superior Court of the State of California, 2021) found that Prop 22 was unconstitutional. Yet, as platforms appeal against the ruling, the legal battle continues on higher judicial instances and Prop 22 remains in effect (Los Angeles Times, 2021).

On the other, court cases brought by workers could still challenge the result of Prop 22. CWA's representative observed that the debate "[is] moving towards a bit of a second boiling point": "a lot of people are waiting to see what happens when the first suit, because it's only a matter of time, is brought under both Prop 22 exemptions versus the initial Dynamex ruling [which confirmed the misclassification of platform workers as self-employed]" (Interview 15). Whatever the future developments in terms of legal classification may be, the ongoing legal uncertainty leaves San Francisco's platform workers in a precarious situation. Although not all platforms are exempted from AB 5, the quote of OEWD's official – that AB 5 did not "roll out in San Francisco" either in parts or in its entirety – suggests that local workers have so far not benefitted from the California-wide pushes to grant them employment-related benefits.

5.2.1.1 Contrasting visions of the State-level Workforce Association

Interestingly, the views of California's Workforce Association CWA and San Francisco's OEWD on platform work diverge, mirroring the greater willingness of California state officials to act against the misclassification of workers. While OEWD regards app-based work as necessary means to make ends meet in an expensive urban environment and no major concern within the "hot" urban economy, CWA's representative urged to rethink the view that any job is acceptable for jobseekers. He shared his observation that, "there's a lot of conversation in the workforce development space broadly, that's kind of well, any job [...] is a good job". He recognised an important role of his and similar departments, including OEWD, in challenging that view and encouraging the uptake of higher-quality, more stable employment: "we as the workforce system need to change that rhetoric and say we are successful when our programme participants are [...] working in jobs that have safety, economic security, quality of life really built into them" (Interview 15). CWA's official was not entirely opposed to platform work, because "there are increased barriers to labour market participation that gig work is broadly beneficial for and helpful". However, favouring such gigs would entail "a need to both balance out the power dynamics between the contractor and the contractee and find ways to make [...] an actual kind of certification and income in [...] that kind of work" (Interview 15), for instance through measures like AB 5.

Even though the practical implications of that divergence are negligible, since the CWA does not hold competences over operations or strategies of OEWD, yet alone over San Francisco's municipal position on platform work, it points to more nuanced and diverse opinions of stakeholders towards such work in the city. This nuance, in turn, demonstrates that the state of the city's platform economy is not without critics. While such opinions do not criticise the presence of platform work per se, they suggest a recognition of the currently precarious working arrangements of platform workers and a desire to address them. In terms of AB 5 and Prop 22, though, views of CWA and OEWD were not at odds because "[o]fficially, CWA did not have any positions on either of [...] those measures" (Interview 15), maybe due to its collaboration with businesses as well as jobseekers, similar to OEWD.

5.2.1.2 Potential state-level initiatives beyond AB 5

Apart from AB 5, there is a range of additional debates that might inform state-level initiatives and thus affect platform work in San Francisco in the future. The interview participant from CWA reported of "political shifts and pushes for the California based universal basic income or guaranteed income or a California based [...] healthcare system that's state run" (Interview 15). Respective trials are already underway in Californian cities, where two examples deserve short introduction. In Stockton, selected residents benefitted from monthly, unconditional payments of USD 500.- over the course of one year. In the eyes of CWA's employee, the project constituted a "successful pilot programme [with] exciting findings" of increased wellbeing in the community (Interview 15). In Long Beach, meanwhile, a new app reverts the relationship between workers and companies by letting workers post their availabilities online, and platforms or other companies can hire them during those times. CWA's representative added that "it has a built-in [...] surge pricing functionality, much in the same way that Uber goes up around rush hour" (Interview 15), paying workers more when demand for their services increases.

Although these examples are geographically and temporarily limited without having progressed beyond trial stages, they show that San Francisco's platform economy is embedded in a dynamic environment. That environment, created by municipal governments as well as private initiators in other Californian cities, not only experiments with solutions surrounding platform work but also benefits from a state government willing to improve

conditions of workers through initiatives like AB 5, which can set precedents for other regulators.

5.2.2 Pressure from the federal government

Unlike in the remaining cases of Madrid and Milan, where national governments hold key positions in shaping the working conditions on platforms through legislative means, the role of the US federal administration has so far had comparatively little influence on San Francisco's platform economy. This, again, is due to the distribution of labour law competences between various governmental levels and the lack thereof on federal level, a result of the country's federal structure. However, the failure to implement AB 5 in California, and particularly the successful opposition of platforms through Prop 22, is "not something that sits well with anybody in today's [US] Department of Labour. And they want to really strengthen protections for workers with a lot of focus on gig and independent work", according to OEWD's representative (Interview 10). He therefore expected the federal government to test the limits of its competences and issue recommendations, seeking to avoid widespread exemptions for certain companies: "I do think that [...] the Biden administration is going to find the time to address this [...] Washington, D.C., I think they will try to provide guidance for states to, you know, repeal the types of Prop. 22s out there." It is expected that similar proposals for exemption might be put to a vote by platforms in other US states as well, such as Massachusetts (Bloomberg Law, 2021). In California, pressure from the federal government is supposed to lead the state administration to take a stricter line vis-à-vis exempted platforms, with potential effects for platform workers' entitlements to social benefits in San Francisco.

5.2.3 Competition with other cities over companies

Lastly, on the metropolitan level and in relation to other US cities, there has been pressure to adopt pro-business measures, fuelled by business interests warning of the growing competitiveness of other cities. Compared to Milan (Chapter 6), for instance, where pressure is exerted by other Italian city governments being particularly supportive of platform workers' rights, San Francisco's case reflects external pressure to accommodate corporations and platforms. This situation stems from the argument that San Francisco's

status as hotspot of digital growth and innovation is not undisputed. In fact, aforementioned negative externalities of pollution, traffic congestion, and exorbitant living costs have caused highly skilled workers and headquarters of several companies to leave the city and relocate to other US metropolitan regions. Austin, Seattle, and New York have been popular destinations for them (New York Times, 2021). Crucially, competition from other cities might influence the municipal approach towards platforms. There might be widespread concern among policymakers that San Francisco's "golden goose" (Interview 9) turns into a lame duck if the most prominent, innovative platforms move their offices and trials elsewhere. By seeking to uphold its image of promoting cutting-edge innovation, this trend could lead the municipality to be particularly lenient in tone or substance concerning the growth of platform work. Since platform work is regarded as expression of that innovative image, as shown earlier, City Hall may feel the need to stress how it welcomes such work. The threat might for example change the dynamics within OEWD's structure in favour of its section responsible for attracting businesses.

Further driven by corporations' greater openness to remote working during the pandemic and subsequent departure of highly qualified workers, this trend has led a city-based representation of tech companies, SF.citi, to warn of an ongoing "tech exodus" (SF.citi, 2022: n.p.) from San Francisco. Interestingly, it should be noted that SF.citi, the organisation pushing the narrative of a tech exodus, fulfils the role of a "tech chamber of commerce", or in McNeill's (2016: 502) more critical words, a "lobby for corporations" representing tech and platform giants such as Uber and Instacart. Put differently, businesses and platform companies have seized on the departure of some corporations from San Francisco to promote the urgent necessity of pro-business attitudes and actions, such as tax breaks. By highlighting their economic contributions to the city in terms of tax revenue, human capital, and job creation on one hand, and lamenting how "San Francisco policymakers have spent the last near-decade mounting regulatory barriers against the tech industry" on the other, the lobby promotes the need for business-friendly policies on its website (SF.citi, 2022: n.p.). This represents one approach through which platforms seek to ensure a political and regulatory environment favouring their interests, as Section 5.3 will elaborate next.

5.3 Platforms' resistance and workers' powerlessness

To critics of platform capitalism, San Francisco demonstrates the power of capital over politics. Platforms have so far prevailed in debates concerning the future of platform work thanks to a unique mobilisation of financial resources and political lobbying on various governmental levels, demonstrating the influence non-state actors can exert over governance processes. Although the interests and response of City Hall are not altered by platforms' aggressive resistance to any form of regulation, since their interests are broadly aligned, it is workers' influence which has been undermined by corporate attempts to limit public intervention, above all California's AB5. Incumbent businesses equally have had little success in opposing the arrival of platforms as well, the example of San Francisco's taxi industry shows.

5.3.1 The power of platforms

Platform companies hold a special position in discussions on platform work in San Francisco. As growing proportion of the "golden goose" Silicon Valley, they form part and parcel of the city's current economic competitiveness. Compared to their presence in other cities, platforms have a special relationship with San Francisco – in terms of its economy and workforce but also municipality – since many of them have been conceived and rolled out here first. Regarding their relations with the local workforce, it should be noted that platforms do not uniformly promote the independent contractor work model in the city, and some have attempted to improve working conditions by entitling their workers to social benefits. Still, these efforts have so far not yielded any concrete result, as the most promising example of Postmates, a delivery platform, shows. "Postmates was fairly more progressive with some of their ideas around how to provide benefits and support for their what they call their fleet, their delivery people. And they wanted to provide portable benefits and they wanted to pool resources amongst the other big companies", OEWD's representative recollected, "and then Uber bought them" (Interview 10). Portable benefits would have allowed platform workers to, for example, accumulate pension savings partly paid by their platforms. Uber, meanwhile, is opposed to changes of the independent contractor model, as the company's opposition to California-wide laws reflects.

Platforms' efforts to shape local governance of platform work and defend the independent contractor model are aimed at both city and state-level. Regarding the relations between

platforms and the municipality, OEWD's employee confirmed that platforms do interact with departments of City Hall, most notably in OEWD's steering group, which brings together local different stakeholders, including platform workers' representatives. OEWD's officials use the steering group to identify local labour market trends and determine required workforce and training programmes in response. Yet, these discussions have little influence on platforms' operation and work model. "[W]e're able to provide feedback for the Ubers of the world on [...] their policies, but I feel like very rarely do they pivot on their agenda based on that feedback" (Interview 10). Instead, platforms appear eager to promote the pro-business forces present in San Francisco. SF.citi, the city-level lobby of technology companies introduced above, suggests a close connection between businesses and the city government. TechSF, a municipal initiative set up by OEWD that seeks to create pathways for unemployed residents into the tech sector, cooperated with the organisation and helped retrain workers for "lower paid jobs in the tech industry" (McNeill, 2016: 502). Furthermore, it was reported (McNeill, 2016; Walker, 2018) that the founder of SF.citi made substantial donations to the electoral campaign of former San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee. While corporate donations to political campaigns are common in the US (Elsässer et al., 2018), this episode highlights once more tech companies' efforts to maintain close ties with urban policymakers. Even though interview participants were unaware of any cooperation initiatives directly between platforms and the municipal government, high-level talks were not excluded and indeed seem reasonable considering above indications about the close links between tech industries and City Hall. While the Chief Economist believed that, "I don't see a lot of public drives towards reconciliation there" (Interview 9), OEWD's representative said about such talks that "I assume they're happening [...] where we've got city leaders talking to the leaders of the Ubers of the world" (Interview 10).

In spite of the alignment of interests between the city government and platform companies, both in favour of platform work, some platforms do not comply with municipal pieces of regulation. One prominent example is the so-called City Option, a municipal initiative aiming to ensure that every worker has access to healthcare. The City Option grants residents access to selected clinics and hospitals and receive medical treatment paid for by the city, financed through employers' contributions. The Chief Economist explained its significant and innovative nature:

“one of the things San Francisco did way in advance of the United States that's specific about the gig economy was we required in 2006 everyone to either, every

employee, and if they're not employed, they would be covered, employers have to either provide health insurance, give money to their employees to buy their own health insurance or pay into what's called the City Option” (Interview 9).

However, although this San Francisco-specific service officially is available to platform workers, not just employees, as the municipal Office of Labor Standards Enforcement OLSE (OLSE, 2020a: 12) has determined, some platforms have failed to contribute to the City Option. In a recent case, the delivery platform DoorDash reached a settlement with OLSE after the company had been found in violation of the city’s healthcare ordinance (City Attorney of San Francisco, 2021). The City Option underlines the potential leeway municipalities have in supporting platform workers and alleviating some of their vulnerabilities, despite limited competences in labour affairs. However, its difficult enforcement demonstrates not only that independent contractors miss out on some of San Francisco’s other initiatives due to their misclassification, such as the minimum wage, but that platforms test the limits of city-wide laws and do not necessarily comply.

In addition to actions on municipal level, the attention and resources of the most prominent platforms, including Uber and Lyft, have been focused on the state level due to respective legal initiatives aiming to classify platform workers as employees. The episode concerning California’s wide-ranging AB 5 and its failure brought about by platforms’ Prop 22 – discussed in detail earlier – supported Wolf’s (2022) finding that platforms operating in cities seek to interact with higher governmental levels to pre-empt any municipal attempts at regulation.

Financial capital is key to the promotion of platforms’ interests. On one hand, it has been decisive in funding opposition to legislative proposals on city and state levels or support mayoral campaigns. On the other, investors and venture capitalists have indirectly promoted the precarious conditions of app-based workers in the city. According to a researcher on precarity in San Francisco, these capitalists represent “another really important kind of institutional element and actor” (Interview 4) in the city, and he offered two justifications for his claim. First, few other cities benefit from comparably high levels of private investments, which companies and city authorities seek to maintain. Second, investors promulgate certain business models which they deem cost-efficient, including the use of independent contractors, by investing their capital into platform companies. The researcher

underlined that “around 50 percent of the venture capital in the whole country comes from Silicon Valley. And they have a huge influence on these individual firms who are vying for different rounds of pretty unregulated capital” (Interview 4). Indeed, McNeill (2016: 494) has considered investors a driving force behind the “digital growth coalition” present in the city: through media campaigning and support for tech interest groups, “angel capitalists” investing in start-ups and venture capitalists have successfully established a narrative in San Francisco’s political discourse which assigns platforms – not just digital labour platforms but the sharing economy more broadly – key roles in the provision of services, such as housing and transport. Combined with efforts from tech lobbies such as SF.citi, they reinforce the business and innovation-friendly environment in the Bay Area.

5.3.2 Involved but not influential: platform workers

San Francisco constitutes a major centre of platform work, with numbers of ride-sharing drivers alone estimated to be between 40-55,000 (Interview 9; San Francisco Chronicle, 2021). In terms of influence on governance processes, their impact has however been limited due to weak unionism and limited resources. Local platform workers have found representation in self-organised initiatives or communities that demand improvements for a wide range of precarious workers. Jobs With Justice SF or Gig Workers Rising, for example, support workers in pushing for a wage, greater transparency in platforms’ price-setting, and involvement in corporate consultations (ReWork the Bay, 2020). We Drive Progress, meanwhile, consists of local ridesharing workers from across different platforms that focuses on attracting public attention to the challenges faced by that specific kind of group, including the use of algorithms in rating workers and distributing rides.

One forum where platform workers, represented by abovementioned communities, get to voice their opinions and hence provide input to the urban policymaking process is OEWD’s steering committee. Going beyond merely representing workers, the committee allows them to engage with platforms, OEWD’s official pointed out: “we do have [workers’ representatives] on our steering committee, but we also have Postmates and other [platform] companies on our steering committee. And they are there definitely at odds” (Interview 10). Even if the city government’s leeway for setting the legal framework of platform work may be limited, due to labour competences on state level, the quote suggests that officials of the

municipality witness the tensions between platforms and workers, and crucially are made aware of the vulnerable situation of many workers.

Platform workers are not unionised, which is similar to large parts of the city's workforce, according to the Chief Economist (Interview 9). While app-based workers in Milan (Chapter 6) and Madrid (Chapter 7), for instance, have been incorporated in established unions and have thus been able to benefit from their access to funds but also to governmental bodies and negotiating tables, San Francisco's platform workers have not enjoyed comparable support. They hence hold one fewer channel for organising into large, impactful communities that can represent their interests in public or political arenas. Despite its labour roots and former industrial base, San Francisco no longer has large, unionised workforces as it used to in the past, the Chief Economist explained: "there are no more unionised industries in San Francisco other than health care, a few hotels [...] and the government" (Interview 9). He furthermore stressed that it was not in the interest of platform companies to promote unionisation of their workers, as it could undermine their use of a flexible workforce classified as independent contractors: "I just don't hear like [...] Uber say here's our plan to unionise the Uber drivers."

Though platform workers organised demonstrations in the run-up to the ballot on Prop 22 and continue to regularly protest against precarious working conditions (San Francisco Chronicle, 2021), making them particularly visible in public spaces, their influence on shaping platform work governance has been negligible. Platform worker communities would have been satisfied with the provisions of AB 5 (Jobs With Justice, 2022), but the success of Prop 22 has left workers in ongoing legal uncertainty over their entitlements to employment-related benefits.

5.3.3 Platforms' first victims: incumbent businesses

The fate of incumbent businesses further demonstrates platforms' success in establishing their business models and platform work in the urban sphere. The arrival of platforms in San Francisco provoked the resistance of incumbents, including taxi providers, who fought the growth of ride-sharing platforms and their workers. Yet, they have had no success in

preventing the spread of platforms in the city. The example of the local taxi industry is particularly telling, as taxi use collapsed by 65% within eighteen months after Uber entered the market (Bond, 2015). The city's Chief Economist recounted the following episode:

“I know this because my department and for a brief while me was responsible for regulating the taxi industry in San Francisco, [...] the taxi commission wanted there to be one thousand five hundred taxis in San Francisco because that's what the taxi companies wanted for a variety of rent seeking behaviour [...]. But the point is, once Uber came along and got themselves declared not taxis, not subject to the taxi commission, the State basically allowed them to do whatever they wanted” (Interview 9).

Previous studies have analysed why, compared to similar industries in other cities, San Francisco's taxi sector has been unsuccessful in its opposition. Flores et al. (2017) found that the mayor's office role was decisive, holding the view that regulation of ridesharing platforms should be decided on the State level, which in turn granted them permission to operate. In a highly critical account, Walker's (2018: n.p.) analysis of the interaction of tech capital and politics concluded that the financial support of tech companies to his electoral campaign resulted in the mayor “[continuing] to bow to tech giants such as Uber” during his years in office from 2011 to 2017. From a different perspective, the fate of San Francisco's taxi sector once more reflects the innovation-friendly spirit of the Bay Area. The Chief Economist saw the struggle of taxi operators with Uber's arrival as emblematic of a widespread view in the city, according to which new industries or technologies require adaptation, not prohibition: “one of the lessons from San Francisco is [...] even if certain political forces in the city are saying no to the gig economy, certain other technological forces in the city are saying yes. And the net effect of that [...] is that you're stuck with it and you have to adapt to it” (Interview 9).

Overall, wealthy non-state actors exert significant influence over the conditions and social entitlements of platform workers in San Francisco. Due to their financial resources, “political savvy” (Rauch et al., 2015: 33), and their ability to harness the innovation, business, and tech-friendly spirits in the city government, platform companies have managed to determine the shape of app-based work in the “tech capital of the world” (Walker, 2018: n.p.). The final section will discuss the power constellation among the various actors in San Francisco's governance of platform work.

5.4 Discussion

The San Francisco case study creates the impression that the actors with the largest financial resources shape the governance of app-based work in the city, by blocking state-wide regulatory initiatives and funding political campaigns. Still, this is only one part of the explanation for the continued precarity of platform workers in the Californian city. The remaining sections will bring together the insights generated through MLG and propose a more nuanced account of how the combination of business interests, pro-innovation spirits, and limited competences on city-level interact to produce the particular circumstances for platform workers. The municipal response does reflect an innovative approach that seeks to mitigate the social costs of a highly competitive urban economy, albeit without the extent of workers' protection their classification as employees could grant. Meanwhile, ongoing tensions between policymakers, platforms, and workers show that platforms' dominance in deciding the future of San Francisco's app-based workers remains contested, suggesting a dynamic power constellation.

5.4.1 Lessons for a polarised labour market

The city and the wider Bay Area are where much of the global digital economy's future is written, due to the presence of the world's largest established – and upcoming – platform companies using the metropolitan area as testing ground. As such, the city witnesses the effects of automation and digitalisation on its local workforce, epitomised by the growth of platform work, before many other urban areas. This privileged position grants the municipality a role as both role model and blueprint for the approaches of other city governments towards platform work, as Flores et al. (2017: 3757) unveiled using the example of Uber: “the regulatory resolution found in this city has largely set the tone for ridesourcing's reception in other large U.S. cities.”

Therefore, San Francisco's City Hall offers one glimpse into potential blueprints for municipal policies on platform work. An optimistic view of the city's municipal response to platform work would note City Hall's attempts to foster an innovative environment while

minimising the costs of rising inequality, and in which platforms perform an important function as job and income providers. There are two notable elements in its approach, as shown earlier: the first element consists of the role platform work is assigned in the municipality's social and economic policies. It acts as important source of income in the face of high living costs and widespread poverty and homelessness. The second element, which emerged through documentary analysis of municipal policy and strategy papers, lies in the awareness among municipal officials of the repercussions of automation and digitalisation in the local labour market, driving the polarisation of workers into low- and high-paid sectors. The literature review (Chapter 2) already highlighted how the automation of work processes is expected to make many middle-class workers redundant and contribute to the growth of inequality. Considering how San Francisco has become a local growth machine for certain jobs yet unaffordable for others, such development could already be an expression of increasing polarisation. Interestingly, and in contrast to Madrid's and Milan's municipalities, OEWD recognises that risk and justifies its workforce strategy accordingly, as stated in its joint report with the Californian thinktank IFTF (IFTF, 2015: n.p.): it underlines the urgency to "Anticipate Job erosion and the Need for Reskilling".

Consequently, the municipal decision to embrace platform work while promoting skills training as remedy against polarisation in the local labour market offers more lessons for other cities than it might initially seem. Although the shift towards embracing such work could be critiqued for equally embracing the exploitation of independent contractors through digitally-enabled corporations, taking a too favourable position towards platforms, and playing into their hands as discussed in the next paragraphs, it proposes one potential path for dealing with platform work. That path regards platform work as part of the solution to managing the future of work in cities, not part of the problem. It also represents an attempt by the city government to manage its limited influence on decisions surrounding the conditions of platform work.

5.4.2 A dynamic power constellation

A more critical view would however question the influence of business and capitalist interests on legislative and policymaking processes, and the subsequent costs for the city's platform workers. In a Marxist tradition of stressing the struggle between capital and labour,

Walker (2018: n.p.) described San Francisco's position at the confluence of technological innovation and financial capital flows as "a place that despite all its good fortunes thrives on some of the worst tendencies of today's capitalism and mega-urbanism [...] a social body infected with the overheated pursuit of riches and expansion". A similarly critical perspective would point out how savvy, capital-rich platforms have managed to shift the power constellation in their favour. AB 5 would have set a significant precedent for the protection of workers' rights and would have demonstrated the potentially wide-ranging scope of policymakers to reign in platforms' tendency towards "regulatory arbitrage" (Prassl, 2018: 21), evading or challenging legal provisions. Yet, the three major players Uber, Lyft and DoorDash succeeded in undermining the state's legislative competence.

This result does not imply the acceptance of platforms' dominance by other stakeholders. In his study on the impact of venture capital on San Francisco's governance of platforms, McNeill (2016: 494) observed the presence of a "digital growth coalition": a consensus among business interest groups and political elites, above all the mayor, that the presence of a growing tech sector is conducive to the city's economy and labour market. When it comes to platform work, MLG has unveiled a more nuanced image of the power constellation at play. Platform companies have indeed successfully defended their business model against regulatory attempts while continuing to benefit from both the municipal recognition of app-based work as positive outcome, as well as from the widespread pro-innovation spirit of Silicon Valley. However, the ongoing resistance from California's state government and the willingness of the US federal government to enact measures in support of workers suggest that platforms' dominance in the governance of platform work has not been accepted. The view of CWA's representative that not every job is necessarily a good job (Interview 15) further indicates that the tensions caused by platforms' use of independent contractors are not yet resolved, as do calls by platform worker collectives to address their precarious conditions (Jobs With Justice SF, 2022). In the Chief Economist's words, platforms and workers continue "to be at each other's throats" (Interview 9).

Hence, drawing on MLG, these developments highlight the dynamic and flexible nature of platform work governance in San Francisco. Platform companies challenged the decisive position of Californian lawmakers and enforced their view of how workers should be classified but remain subject to the opposition of workers and policymakers on state and federal levels. The city government might not recognise a viable alternative to its current

response without risking the city's attractiveness to significant global corporations or without trespassing its competences in labour regulation. However, state and federal administrations try to enforce AB 5 or find alternative mechanisms. Consequently, various forces continue to seek influence over shape and extent of platform work in San Francisco.

5.5 Conclusion

Examining the relationship of the four MLG indicators reveals why the business practices of platforms, leaving their workers in precarious conditions, continue largely unaddressed in San Francisco. While California-wide efforts to classify independent contractors as employees have been successfully thwarted by a multi-million campaign of the largest digital labour platforms, the city government and OEWD assign platforms an important function in San Francisco's workforce strategy. Though the "golden goose" – in the Chief Economist's words (Interview 9) – exacerbates inequalities between the city's richest and poorest population groups, it is seen as provider of income and work for local jobseekers who struggle to make ends meet. The municipal approach to platform work mirrors attempts to balance the desire to attract innovative businesses with the need to respond to the needs of workers, most notably through the City Option. Thus, in contrast to the following cases of Milan and Madrid, San Francisco's municipality openly welcomes platform work and recognises it as important element in its attempt to mitigate the negative externalities of a competitive labour market in an expensive city. Drawing on the MLG framework, the distinct response to app-based work by Milan's city government will be analysed in the following.

6. Case study of Milan – a balance of commitments to workers’ rights and innovation

In Milan, the promises and perils of platform work are particularly notable, as app-based work has become a significant feature of the urban economy and labour market. High demand for platform services by a prosperous, predominantly young population, coupled with the city’s reputation for business and innovation – often being considered Italy’s economic capital with an above-average GDP per capita (Table 9) – have created fertile conditions for a growing range of platform services. Platform work represents an additional facet to Milan’s large group of precarious jobs, including the “creative precariat” (Arvidsson et al., 2010: 296) in its fashion or IT sectors. However, the rise of app-based work has visibly produced tensions between workers and platforms, for instance through court cases and regular demonstrations against insecure working conditions (Chesta et al., 2019). In response, Milan’s municipality (*Comune di Milano*) has chosen to take an active role in the governance of platform work, more so than the governments of San Francisco or Madrid. The reasons for the proactive municipal response are to be analysed in this chapter.

Table 9: Selected economic indices of Milan.

Economic index	Value
Unemployment rate (2019)	5.9%
Youth unemployment rate (2018)	18.6%
GDP per capita in Milan (2018)	€46,000
GDP per capita in Italy (2018)	€25,000
Population (2018)	1,386,285
Number of residents experiencing homelessness (2017)	12,004

Data sources: Feantsa (2017), Comune di Milano (2018), ISTAT.

The analysis of Milan’s municipal response through the four MLG indicators (1. roles, views, and involvement of non-state actors; 2. relationship between governmental levels regarding platform work; 3. availability of competences and instruments on municipal level; and 4. involvement of the municipality in the policy debate on platform work) will help understand the dynamics that lead the city government to seek local solutions to the issue. The analysis will proceed in four parts. Section 6.1 will discuss the significance of platform

work in a local labour market characterised by precarious jobs, the municipality's proactive management of a growing group of app-based workers, and the tensions in the municipal agenda between protecting workers' rights and promoting an enabling environment for platform companies. These tensions arise from the desire to concurrently promote "the rights of all precarious workers", in the words of a municipal Councillor (Interview 12), and host "open-air laboratories of innovative practices" (Bernardi et al., 2018: 40). Section 6.2 will evaluate the roles of different governmental levels, highlighting both the lack of progress in nation-wide attempts to regulate platform work as well as the pressure exerted on Milan by other Italian city governments to take wide-ranging local measures in support of workers. The influence of non-state actors on platform work governance through a variety of channels, benefitting from the openness of city and state-level policymakers to engage with them but also from the success of unions and platforms at organising into interest groups, will be examined in Section 6.3. Attention will be paid to the diverse opinions on platform work regulation and the municipality's perception within these groups, even if these differences have not affected the policy outcome. The discussion in Section 6.4 will draw on the preceding insights to sketch the particular power constellation, attesting the influential positions of non-state actors, and question the sustainability of Milan's municipal response.

Overall, MLG reveals a distinct governance process, characterised by a city government eager to mediate between workers and platforms while welcoming innovative business practices in the urban economy. Insufficient national responses to platform work and pressure from other Italian city governments to resolve tensions between platforms and workers have led the municipality to adopt a proactive approach to managing the growth of app-based work. However, its ambitions have pushed the city government to the limits of its competences, where it partly relies on the cooperation of non-state actors to realise its initiatives. The use of health and safety standards and of changes in transport policy are creative ways of supporting workers' interests, yet the most promising project, a 'Riders Spot' for platform workers, has been delayed due to platforms' reluctance to finance the initiative. These municipal actions mirror the lack of legislative competences – held by the national Labour Ministry – that could grant app-based workers better working conditions, even if some workers' representatives recognise greater scope for municipal initiatives.

6.1 Proactive approach despite a “precarious” balance

Milan represents an exciting case of platform work governance. Not only is the city a hotbed for app-based work alongside other precarious types of work, but the municipal management of the phenomenon consists of a proactive and interactive approach that engages with relevant stakeholders and resorts to regulatory tools. That approach results from the municipal tendency to adopt interactive governance modes that involve – and rely on – non-state actors as well as its commitment to the protection of workers’ rights. However, questions have arisen over the sustainability of that approach and what a local researcher referred to as the “precarious equilibrium” (Interview 1) it produces: that equilibrium oscillates between social inclusiveness and economic competitiveness as the municipality tries to balance the interests of workers and platforms. This section will first provide a short background of local platform work before examining indicators 3 and 4 of multi-level governance, the choice of policy tools by the city government, and the motivations behind it.

6.1.1 Characteristics of platform work in Milan

Platform work did not introduce the phenomenon of precarious work to Milan but has penetrated high- and low-paid sectors in the city. The strength of Milan’s economy rests on both material and immaterial production, with the latter accounting for an increasing share of economic activity (Arvidsson et al., 2010). It is material in the sense of producing, for example, high-end furniture and clothing, and immaterial as far as its service sector is concerned. Crucially, both types rely on a large group of often precarious workers. Not only is the city world-famous for its ‘weeks’ – conferences and exhibitions on design, fashion, or technology which underpin the significance of hostelry, hospitality, digital innovation, and related service sectors – but the marketing behind much of the material aspects of Milan’s economy are sustained by a large workforce in services as well. Jobs in these service sectors are not necessarily low-paid: as part of the polarised labour market, “contracts range from the consultancy to [...] other forms of contracts”, hence can include short-term contracts in consulting or IT, according to the interviewee from *Osservatorio Mercato del Lavoro* (OML), Milan’s Labour Market Observatory, a department of the metropolitan authorities tasked with economic research (Interview 14). In addition, self-employment and freelancing

are integral to the city's labour market, further indicating a diverse urban economy where "standard" employment relations are not the norm (Cherry et al., 2017).

Thus, many of the sectors that typify Milan's economy are based on a large group of precarious workers with unstable incomes and irregular working hours. These workers form the "underlying infrastructure" of some of the city's most famous sectors, in the words of one interview participant who researches the effects of digitalisation on Italian labour law (Interview 1). One typical example is Milan's fashion industry, where low-paid, irregular contracts promote the growth of a "creative precariat" in the city (Arvidsson et al., 2010: 296) that might bear little resemblance to the food delivery or other gigs of platform workers. Yet, what these jobs have in common are their "discontinuous nature", according to a representative of local freelancers' association ACTA (Interview 11), because workers are hired on time-limited project-based contracts. According to the head of OML, such intermittency is the result of "organisations and employers working specific periods during the year", especially in connection with week-long international exhibitions (Interview 14).

At the same time, platforms have added new dimensions to the city's service sectors and found application in domestic services and freelancing. First, app-based jobs have facilitated the growth of less visible, domestic platform work, extending the diverse forms and applications of platform work in Milan alongside more visible delivery and ride-sharing workers – a challenge for unions and policymakers seeking to understand the full scope of working conditions in the platform economy, Section 6.4 will argue. Second, a further indication of the significance and widespread application of platforms in Milan consists of their use by freelancers and more highly paid professionals, challenging the classic conception of platform work as food delivery or ride-hailing. Freelancers use platforms such as OnlyFans or Patreon to promote their own products or services, ACTA's interview participant pointed out in her written response: "platforms are important not so much as an intermediation channel with clients/employers, but as a place to sell creative content" (Interview 11). This might not be considered platform work according to the definition presented in the literature review (Chapter 2), yet it highlights the ubiquity and penetration of platforms in a wide variety of Milanese economic segments, including higher paid professional services. Instead of acting "for intermediation" (Interview 11) between restaurants, customers and workers, platforms offer professionals the opportunity to market their own products, for example in the case of freelancers in "knowledge and creativity

(graphics, marketing consultants, ICT experts, management consultants, [...] designers, translators...)", the local representative of freelancers explained (Interview 11). Considering the presence of many potentially precarious jobs in Milan, platform work should not be considered the original cause or sole explanation of precarity, according to a Milanese researcher on atypical work: "I think it's a mistake to blame the platform. It's the easy way, but it's not the right one" (Interview 5). Nonetheless, it deserves attention due to its growing extent as well as widespread use across many different service sectors, arguably exacerbating the challenge of fighting precarity for city officials.

Due to such wide array of tasks, jobs, and gigs executed via platforms in Milan, the representative of the Labour Market Observatory OML cannot provide exact data on the number of platform workers present: "I am not able to identify them clearly [because] if you work, for example, as a driver for Uber, you would not be identifiable because [...] Uber is not employing directly" (Interview 14). During the height of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2021, the Prefecture of Milan estimated the number of local delivery riders registered on platforms to be around 66,000, not accounting for platform workers in other sectors, according to a representative of the Milanese chapter of NIDIL, an association of platform workers. Still, even the official estimates might understate the true extent of app-based workers, he believed: "the Prefecture mapped around 66,000 workers in the food delivery section. [...] They are not really sure, they could be way more but that's what they think it is, more or less" (Interview 16). Apart from the circumstances of the pandemic fuelling the growth of platform workers (Chapter 8), the popularity of this type of work in Milan has been explained by NIDIL's representative due to the high living costs which lead people to engage on platforms: "They [are] in extreme need of a quick and easy, even if it's not that easy money" (Interview 16).

6.1.2 The municipality as monitor and mediator

Milan – alongside other Italian cities like Turin, Bologna, or Naples – has experienced the expansion of platform work and subsequent tensions through court cases and regular protests of workers (Chesta et al., 2019). The responsible municipal department for Urban Economy and Employment (*Economia Urbana e Lavoro*) has responded in a proactive manner. For instance, it has asked a local university to conduct research on demographics, motivations,

and challenges of Milanese platform workers to inform its actions. “The Municipal Department [...] tried to find more information about riders in our city. The result was a survey developed with Università Statale di Milano” (Interview 12), the responsible municipal Councillor for Labour Policies, Economic Development, Commerce, and Human Resources reported.

Most importantly, the department seeks to mediate between relevant stakeholders, including unions and platforms, while enacting regulatory measures that support workers’ interests and monitoring legislative proposals on the national level. A central element of the collaboration between municipality, representatives of platform workers, and platform companies is the monthly roundtable organised by the municipal Councillor. She explained in a written response that, “In last years, the Municipality dedicated a constant commitment on workers needs and opened a consultation tables [sic] with the social partners and platform companies” (Interview 12). Its purpose is to offer a formal communication channel to address city-specific conflicts in the platform economy and reconcile the different interests of stakeholders. In terms of the dynamics between the various interest groups participating in the roundtable, NIDIL’s representative described the relationship with the city government as “easy way of talking”, or straightforward, due to sharing the “same political ideals, in a broad sense” (Interview 16), a hint at the municipality’s left-wing nature and openness to engage with social partners. Relations between unions and platforms are mixed, however: Just Eat’s intention to hire all new workers on regular contracts has contributed to constructive conversations, in the eyes of NIDIL’s interview participant, whereas “[the relationship with] Glovo is the most difficult one” (Interview 16), due to Glovo’s ongoing commitment to the use of the independent contractor model.

Despite the promising potential of regular dialogue between public and private actors, concrete results of the consultations have been sparse. Changes in transportation rules, allowing riders to carry their bikes aboard public transport, have thus far represented the most significant outcomes, in the view of NIDIL’s representative: “a lot of riders need to take public transportation to arrive to the city to be able to work, and need to bring the bike to them. So [the municipality] made an important [change] about being able to transport the bike into the transportation” (Interview 16). In fact, the following example of the ‘Riders Spot’ demonstrates the difficulty of reaching any agreements between the interest groups

even when they do not address the most contentious issue, namely the correct legal classification of workers.

One of the most promising debates of the monthly roundtable has been the conception of a so-called ‘Riders Spot’. Influenced by the role models of Turin and Naples, it aims to offer support for the city’s growing number of platform workers, though not only riders. As a one-stop-shop, workers can request administrative support and share their concerns directly with city clerks. The Riders Spot was described as “negligible” (Interview 1) by a researcher on digitalisation and labour law due to its inability to fundamentally change working conditions: “[the Spot is] a sort of office where workers can basically share their grievances, their concerns, but nothing mandatory, nothing binding”. Nonetheless, it could represent an important support mechanism for non-EU workers, who account for most delivery riders. Since “many of them [have] little knowledge of Italian language [and have] no ideas of the employment contract they signed”, according to the Councillor (Interview 12), the project could help them navigate the local platform economy and understand their rights as platform workers. Moreover, the researcher on atypical work recognised the Riders Spot’s potential as “meeting space” (Interview 5) for different kinds of platform workers, allowing them to create a sense of community in the absence of formal workplaces provided by the respective companies. Alas, despite its ambitious objectives and the availability of a suitable location, the Riders Spot has failed to progress from conception to realisation. A lack of funding, originally promised by platform companies, has delayed the project which might consequently open by 2022 or 2023 at the earliest, as NIDIL’s representative lamented:

“the food delivery organisations were supposed to pay for the project and one of them offered to do it, but this was before the court [ruling] about having to pay 733 million euros [due to missed social security payments]. So [I do not] know if they are still going to be willing to pay” (Interview 16).

This episode demonstrates two significant facts. First, the municipal approach to platform work governance requires the cooperation of other actors. In this case, the realisation of City Hall’s initiative regarding the Riders Spot depended on platforms’ agreement to finance the project. Second, this dependence grants non-state actors greater influence over governance processes by being able to block measures that could support workers; Section 6.3 will return to this point, as will the chapter on the Covid-19 pandemic, when the supply of protective equipment for workers was delayed by platforms. Yet, the reliance on other local actors or interest groups is both wanted and needed by City Hall, as argued in the following.

6.1.2.1 *Interactive governance*

The roundtable and its involvement of non-state actors is not surprising per se, as the governance style of Milan's municipality is typically marked by cooperation and engagement with stakeholders. The analysis of policy documents through NVivo revealed that the municipal choice of policy instruments centres around the collaboration between the city government and workers' representatives, businesses, local universities, and thinktanks, all of whom are expected to exercise an "economic development function" (Comune di Milano, 2018: n.p.), which includes contributing to the formulation and realisation of municipal policies. This 'interactive' approach, following Mercier et al.'s (2016: 95) categorisation of urban policy instruments, has both ideological and practical reasons: they are ideological insofar as the city government wants to be seen as sympathetic to workers and open to listen to them, and they are practical due to the municipality's reliance on other actors to govern the complex metropolis with limited resources.

Generally, the municipality pursues an ambitious policy agenda that seeks to combine economic and social development. In terms of economic policy, the city government acts as enabler and promoter of start-ups, incubators, and co-working spaces, providing financial support or physical spaces for the creation of new businesses (Comune di Milano, 2018). Meanwhile, in terms of social policy, the municipality seeks to pursue an inclusive, interactive approach – as documentary analysis revealed – engaging with workers, unions, and businesses alike to understand their needs. This approach reflects the left-leaning coalition running the city government and its aspiration to be seen as open to the concerns of workers, the researcher on digitalisation highlighted: "at the moment the coalition running Milan is left wing" (Interview 1). As the Councillor herself stressed, "The Municipality of Milan promotes the rights of all precarious workers" (Interview 12). A driving force in both economic and social realms has been to "outshine and excel" other Italian municipalities, according to one study (Heidenreich et al., 2016) on social policy in Milan. That desire offers one explanation for municipal ambitions to be not simply the country's most prosperous and creative urban area but also an inclusive municipality that engages in labour issues and can compete with cities which are traditionally regarded as supportive of workers' causes, such as Bologna.

The city government does not view economic and social governance as entirely distinct. It does not limit the purposes of its economic agenda to the “technological dimension” but seeks to “meet social needs”, according to a municipal strategy paper (Comune di Milano, 2014b: n.p.), thus replacing a “traditional pro-growth development model” of the early 2000s with a “mixed development pattern” (Di Vita, 2019: 299). Since 2011, when a new left-wing city government came into power (Cucca et al., 2021), the municipality has sought to “combine the development of innovation and social inclusion” (Comune di Milano, 2018: n.p.). In other words, digital and economic growth should address existing social inequalities in the city. Going beyond mere rhetorical commitments, policies adopted by the municipality do reflect this objective. The example of FabriQ, one of several business incubators in the city’s most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, highlights how the city government uses its resources to fund start-ups that are expected to create both innovation and employment in the long run (Comune di Milano, 2014a). Social and economic development hence are supposed to go hand in hand, with the crucial contribution of private, non-state actors. The proposed Riders Spot reflects such aim as well, allowing for the continuation of platform services while providing some support to workers, and relying on the cooperation with non-state stakeholders. Such governance style gives non-state actors greater influence over the realisation of municipal initiatives and thus alters the power constellation over the governance of platform work in Milan, later sections will show.

6.1.3 The municipality as enabler and regulator

Despite the preference for engagement, dialogue, and cooperation with stakeholders, the municipality has taken regulatory steps against some platforms, at least as far as its competences have permitted. Most noteworthy, the city government used its inspectorate powers to influence the working conditions in UberEats, the food delivery branch of Uber that relies on riders. The researcher on digitalisation and labour law recounted that “[the municipality] informed platforms that they were going to enforce the health and safety regulation and the food safety regulations. [...] local police officers, for instance, could have checked [...] the safety of the large boxes, the quality of the food” (Interview 1). This example highlights two crucial points: first, the municipality’s willingness to intervene in the local platform economy. Yet also, second, its limited scope for action due to a lack of competences. As the interview participant further explained, the municipality’s policy

instruments mostly allow city officials “to enable, to encourage, to foster dialogue, the social dialogue or to use, for instance, incentives” (Interview 1). City Hall thus needs to resort to alternative means for pursuing its aim of promoting the “rights of all precarious workers”, in the Councillor’s words (Interview 12), and managing the presence of platforms in Milan.

Nonetheless, it can be argued that the city government is not opposed to the presence of platforms per se, as the combination of economic and social development already hinted at. The researcher on digitalisation and labour law underlined a general openness to digital, innovative trends: “Milan is a very [...] forward looking town and city [concerning innovative work practices]” (Interview 1); the example of Milan’s collaboration with Airbnb below will underline this openness. Municipal officials have moreover recognised the positive contributions of platforms to the local economy, namely their role in helping residents make ends meet in an expensive city, and in supporting businesses. As the interview participant further described, Milan hosts a “high number of workers that need to work to meet their living needs” (Interview 1), justifying platform work as easily accessible income source. City Hall’s recognition of platforms’ contribution to Milan’s economy crystallised during the pandemic (Chapter 8), when they helped businesses continue to operate and reach customers despite lockdowns.

A case can be made that the city government seeks to collaborate with platforms when mutual interests are aligned. One example of collaboration is Airbnb, whose representatives were invited to talks with the city government. “The municipality organised a meeting with Airbnb in order to help them to move to a long-term rental [model for local residents]”, the researcher on atypical work pointed out (Interview 5). Municipal efforts to collaborate with the platform were not motivated by concerns surrounding platform work, one interview participant studying regulation of the sharing economy in Italy highlighted: “It’s not a matter of regulating work, it’s a matter of regulating personal income and taxes” (Interview 3). Instead, City Hall was driven by the ambition to “offer more long-term rental” (Interview 5) that alleviates some pressure from the city’s high living costs by increasing the number of available living space in Milan. Interestingly, Airbnb has never faced strong resistance from local citizens compared to other platforms or other Italian cities, the researcher on atypical work observed – “Airbnb has never been such a problem like in other cities” (Interview 5) – offering one explanation for why the municipality may not have seen the need to adopt a restrictive position in Airbnb’s case.

The collaboration between the city government and Airbnb resulted in the drafting and signing of a vaguely worded mutual agreement in November 2015, including the commitment to “give full visibility to the Agreement in conferences and talks” (Sharing Cities Alliance, 2018: n.p.), and a time limit of one year to raise questions about its actual impact on the Milanese housing market. It does however signal the municipality’s general openness towards platforms when mutual objectives – in this case the provision of housing – are aligned, as became visible during the pandemic, too (Chapter 8). One might also argue that the agreement is a sign of willingness on the part of the municipality to experiment with different approaches towards platforms. One previous study (Bernardi et al., 2018) on the city’s sharing economy strategy attested a municipal openness to “open-air laboratories of innovative practices” and described the cooperation with Airbnb as attempt by the city government to “manage [Airbnb’s] presence” (ibid.: 40). The agreement between the two parties confirmed such willingness to experiment, stating that “models of collaboration between public and private entities will be tried out” (Sharing Cities Alliance, 2018: n.p.).

6.1.4 Inclusiveness versus competitiveness

The earlier discussion highlighted the municipal pursuit of the concurrent development of economic innovation and social protection, which is also reflected in City Hall’s approach towards platform work. Yet, a look at the rationale behind the municipality’s position, acting as mediator, regulator, and enabler, reveals an inherent tension that leads to question the strategy’s usefulness, also for other cities. At the heart of this balanced approach lies a conflict of interest between inclusiveness and competitiveness, as the researcher on digitalisation and labour law suggested:

“[the] underlying conflict and contrast or compromise between inclusiveness and competitiveness is one of the most pressing issue[s] for the municipality of Milan. This is a very, let's say, an urgent dilemma that they need to focus on, because [...] this is also problematic in terms of a social resentment and political resentment” (Interview 1).

He believed the city government was “fully aware of this issue”, namely the tensions between letting platforms operate and ensuring the protection of workers’ rights. The regular consultations with workers and platforms also suggest such awareness. Nonetheless,

municipal officials were reluctant to, for example, make a “bold statement in favour of workers [because it] would be contradictory toward the large bulk of operators that are [...] a significant component of the Milanese economy” (Interview 1). NIDIL’s representative shared a similar impression: “[City Hall] could have done way more, especially in terms of exposing themselves mediatically” (Interview 16). Since taking a step in either direction, either by adopting a more lenient position towards platforms or by publicly supporting workers, would in the eyes of the researcher be “detrimental” (Interview 1) to the city’s reputation as centre for economic innovation or to its image as being inclusive, “there has been a sort of tolerance” regarding the presence and business practices of platforms. However, this approach would produce a “precarious equilibrium” (Interview 1) in the interview participant’s view, as the continued precarity of workers would keep platforms in the spotlight of public attention and sustain tensions between the various interest groups. Section 6.4 will evaluate this tension. Still, the equilibrium needs to be considered in the context of other governmental levels, analysed next, which have exerted further pressure on City Hall to manage platform work and balance its tensions within limited competences.

Table 10: Roles of governmental levels in Milan’s platform work governance (MLG indicator 2).

Governmental level	Key departments or officials	Role in platform work governance
Supranational	European Commission, European Council	Potential EU directive on classification of platform workers as employees proposed by the European Commission in December 2021, though negotiations between EU member states are ongoing
National	Ministry of Labour and Social Policies	2019 Riders Decree targeting delivery riders, yet ongoing consultations with representatives of platform workers, unions, and platform companies on the employment relationship between workers and platforms
Regional	Regional Council of Lombardy	Ad-hoc consultations on platform work with regional chapters of Italian unions
Municipal	Councillor for Labour Policies	Organisation of monthly roundtable with representatives of platform workers and platform companies; initiation of Riders Spot; change of transportation rules

6.2 No comprehensive solution from other governmental levels

Apart from reflecting a traditionally interactive governance style, the Milanese response to platform work also constitutes a reaction to public initiatives on other governmental levels (see Table 10), indicator 2 of multi-level governance shows. On one hand, the insufficiency of national attempts to reconcile workers and platforms has led the municipality to pursue its own approach elaborated previously. On the other, Milan's city government finds itself in "positive competition" (Interview 1) with other Italian municipalities over which one manages platform work most effectively. Additionally, legislation on supranational level by the European Union could affect the employment status of app-based workers. It should be noted that an intermediary level exists between the municipal and regional governmental levels, namely the Metropolitan Council, with which OML is associated. Yet, the Metropolitan Council was not mentioned in relation to platform work in any interview or policy paper, likely due to its primary role as deliberative and coordinating forum among the municipal mayors in the metropolitan area, and hence will not feature in this analysis.

6.2.1 Ongoing negotiations on the state level

In legal terms, the greatest influence over working conditions and entitlement to tangible benefits lies not with Italian cities or regions but with the highest administrative level. In Italy, the Ministry of Labour could play a critical role in determining the employment relationship between platforms and workers and therefore shape the working conditions of app-based workers in Milan. Similar to other countries, including Spain (Chapter 7), the influential role of Italy's national Labour Ministry on one hand, and Milan's lack of legislative powers on the other, stem from the distribution of competences between different administrative levels. As the researcher on digitalisation and labour law confirmed, "the municipality cannot act on his own, cannot promote a legislation that only applies to workers operating in Milan" (Interview 1). The local Councillor for Labour Affairs was well aware of that legal constraint when stating in her written response that "workers rights [are] not a Municipality competence [sic]" (Interview 12).

As of late 2022, no nation-wide solution on platform workers' legal classification had been found, apart from the 2019 Riders Decree (*Decreto-legge n. 101/2019*) which aims to

provide a “minimum level of rights” (Portolano Cavallo, 2020) to the group of delivery riders. For example, the decree mandates that platform companies provide information pertaining to safety and security to riders (Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2019). However, both the decree’s exclusive target group as well as its limited scope leave key issues unresolved, above all the legal classification of all platform workers, and require further negotiations between the Labour Ministry and stakeholders (Portolano Cavallo, 2020). The Ministry therefore continues to hold regular consultations with representatives of platforms and workers. The researcher on digitalisation regarded the creation of these national negotiations and the decree as success of platform worker representatives: “[unions and collectives] were so active, so engaged in bringing their claims to the attention of the public opinion that the government and in particular the Labour Ministry [...] decided to basically open a consultation table with those self-organised riders” (Interview 1). Apart from major international platforms Uber, Glovo, and Deliveroo, alongside their Italian interest group AssoDelivery, the roundtable consists of “the three main labour unions in Italy, which are CGIL, CISL, UIL”, NIDIL’s interview participant reported (Interview 16). He further stressed that the national roundtable aims “to find a permanent form of contract for the workers”. Yet, it has yielded only little progress on clarifying workers’ legal status and entitlement to social protections so far: “it’s not taking a lot of actions” (Interview 16).

According to the municipal Councillor, Milan’s city government has not been invited to participate in the national consultations, still it continues to monitor their development and potential consequences for Milan’s labour market. She stated that her department “will be present at the national tables to monitor the evolution of these agreements and their reflections on local economy” (Interview 12). Therefore, potentially far-reaching proposals concerning the conditions of platform work in Milan are debated without the municipality’s direct involvement, but solely among the Labour Ministry, workers’ representatives, and platforms. Still, it is noteworthy that City Hall shows interest in the governance dynamics on higher governmental levels regarding platform work, a possible reflection of municipal officials’ preoccupation about the tensions between workers and platforms in the city.

6.2.2 Absence of regional initiatives

The governmental layer between the municipal and national administrations – the region of Lombardy, whose capital is Milan – has comparatively little impact on the Milanese platform sector, either through regulation or mediation. The regional government, or Regional Council, theoretically shares competences in employment with the national administration while municipalities hold “no proper competencies” (Heidenreich et al., 2016: 124). Nonetheless, the interview participant of OML shared his insight that Milan’s city government enjoys a “certain margin of freedom of action”, and its saying in local economic and social matters is “heavier than the one of Varese or other [municipalities in Lombardy]” (Interview 14). Hence, due to the city’s size and economic importance, the municipality holds greater autonomy in setting city-specific policies on issues where smaller Lombardian cities might be subject to regional intervention. Interviews suggested that this is the case for the platform economy as well. NIDIL’s representative remarked the absence of regional consultations on platform work comparable to the Milanese one: “talking regionally, it’s a bit more difficult because they don’t have an actual, like, roundtable, [with a] focus on riders” (Interview 16). Instead, the interview participant explained that challenges of platform workers are sometimes brought to the attention of the regional government through the Lombardy chapter of CGIL, one of Italy’s largest unions, albeit without the regularity and engagement of multiple stakeholders of a roundtable, and hence without comparable effect on the governance of app-based work. Therefore, the regional government leaves matters relating to platform work to local and national governmental levels, where ongoing dialogues seek to reconcile the interests of the various actors.

6.2.3 “Positive competition” from other Italian cities

Other Italian cities hold no formal powers in the regulation of platform work in Milan, yet they have demonstrated their capacity to lead by example and put pressure on the Milanese municipality to act. They have also offered best practice examples to Milan’s City Hall. Italian cities are hotspots of protests and resistance against platform work, on one hand, and of innovative solutions to the phenomenon on the other. Over the past years, protests of platform workers in Turin, Rome, and Milan itself have captured the attention of national media and put the working conditions of platforms into the spotlight (Chesta et al., 2019). Meanwhile, other Italian municipalities have responded to the growth of platform work in at least three innovative ways. First, Bologna is a noteworthy example for its role in proposing a ‘Charter for fundamental rights of digital work in urban context’ (*Carta dei diritti*

fondamentali del lavoro digitale nel contesto urbano’) in 2018. Through the Charter, platforms commit to adopting fairer working conditions in line with similar sectors that offer collective agreements, as well as to offering insurance and providing transparency on rating algorithms. Signature of the Charter is voluntary, and several Italian platforms have signed it so far, yet with the notable exceptions of some of the largest internationally active companies Deliveroo, Glovo, and UberEats, the researcher on digitalisation explained:

“the charter is only binding for those who sign it. So, at the moment, the charter is not binding for the major operators, Glovo, Deliveroo, UberEats. Two platforms are basically bound by the charter and they are two local platforms [such as] MyMenu” (Interview 1).

Second, Naples and Turin set up dedicated sites for riders where they receive administrative support and get the opportunity to connect with fellow platform workers – role models for Milan’s ‘Riders Spot’, as NIDIL’s interview participant observed: “it happened already in other cities, like in Turin it was open but just by [trade union] CGIL, while in Naples it was open in collaboration between CGIL and the city council. So, they are trying to do the same in Milan.” (Interview 16). Third, the city government of Naples has improved access to the historic city centre for platform workers relying on vehicles or scooters (Interview 16). These actions taken by other cities have hence exerted pressure on Milan to follow suit, as the digitalisation expert explained: “they are [...] left wing coalitions running the municipalities. So, the Milan municipality was a bit under pressure [...] there was a sort of, let's say, a positive competition” (Interview 1). The Riders Spot is the most obvious example of other cities’ influence on Milan’s response to platform work.

Looking beyond Italy, an argument can be made that the most visible and publicly debated developments in other urban areas around the globe affect the dynamics within the local platform economy as well. Milan’s city government might be more perceptive to such transnational pressures than other Italian cities due to its aspiration to be a global innovation hub that seeks to compete with the likes of London, San Francisco, or Singapore. Such pressure could have two opposing effects: it could increase the urgency to act in favour of workers, for example when presented with reports of municipalities that revoke licenses of ride-sharing platforms based on safety concerns. Alternatively, pressure from other global centres could push Milan’s city government to be more lenient towards the growth of

platform work, seeking to foster its reputation for innovation. Considering the municipality's "tolerance", as the digitalisation and labour law expert called it (Interview 1), and its aspiration to be a champion for digital development attested in an earlier study (Moisio et al., 2019), the second effect seems to have prevailed thus far and helps explain the city's openness to platform companies.

6.2.4 Potential influence of supranational measures

Final considerations on the influence of actors on other governmental levels must also account for the role of the European Union (EU) in EU member states, just as in Madrid's case (Chapter 7). Draft legislation by the European Commission foresees to shift the burden of proof on employment status from workers to platforms (Euronews, 2021; Hooker et al., 2022). Consequently, workers would no longer require starting judicial proceedings to determine their rights to benefits such as sick pay or unemployed insurance due to the misclassification as independent contractors. At the time of writing, the Commission's proposals had yet to undergo scrutiny of Members of the European Parliament and national parliaments, thus the timing of their realisation was uncertain (Hooker et al., 2022). However, if successfully implemented, these legislative changes would put workers and unions into a more powerful position and very likely impact the dynamics between the various stakeholders in Milan. It can be assumed that such drastic changes would probably lead to a recalibration of each interest group's aims and roles in platform work governance. Thus far, non-state stakeholders have very actively, and often successfully, defended their interests, as argued next.

6.3 Non-state actors battle on several fronts

Non-state actors play significant roles in Milanese governance processes, thanks to the municipal roundtable – which offers them a portal into the responsible municipal department – but also due to the nature of the Riders Spot, relying on platforms to realise the project. Studying the first indicator of multi-level governance reveals that workers and their representatives, and platform companies and their Italian interest group AssoDelivery, do not confine themselves to the city level, however. The former pursue several avenues to promote their views, including through protests, court cases, and mobilisation of platform

workers, while the latter focus their attention on the national level, although one cannot generalise for all unions and platforms. Opinions on the effectiveness of municipal actions regarding platform work diverge, as do approaches of platforms towards their relations with workers, albeit with negligible effect on governance processes.

6.3.1 Mobilisation and unionisation of workers

Representatives of platform workers – traditional unions as well as distinct Milanese platform worker collectives – offer the most significant channels for amplifying the voices and concerns of workers, at least of those that are highly visible in public spaces. First, trade unions have been successful at organising and representing app-based workers, even if some groups of workers remain difficult to mobilise. Although Italian trade unions are usually thought to represent workers in traditional sectors with standard employment contracts or self-employment (Pulignano et al., 2016), they play an active role in campaigning for independent contractors as well. Their local Milanese chapters are involved in the monthly roundtable and actively seek to expand the number of platform workers they represent. Motivated by the desire to point out and improve working conditions on platforms in the city, the Milanese chapter of NIDIL – a group representing atypical workers within the influential Italian trade union CGIL and the largest local chapter in Italy in terms of membership (Interview 16) – pursues two approaches to affect change. The first path involves “organising events, strikes, rallies [...] trying to make [platform work] so visible and so important, the media are going to talk about it”, NIDIL’s representative described their strategy (Interview 16). Through coordination with groups in other cities of the country, nation-wide protests are supposed to amplify their voice and receive coverage in social and public media. The second path consists of initiating legal disputes for “single workers or a small group of workers that had the same bad experience”, for example when they have been denied “their welfare, their insurance” (Interview 16) by a platform. Such legal approach aims to set a precedent for other court cases. As an earlier quote by the digitalisation and labour law expert in Section 6.2.1 suggested, these strategies have been crucial in persuading the national Labour Ministry to open their roundtable and thus have granted platform workers direct involvement in discussions pertaining to the future of app-based work in Milan and Italy.

Meanwhile, unions map the public squares and parks where delivery workers are most likely to meet. NIDIL's interview participant elaborated how the organisation aimed to "map all the squares and the places in which riders hang out most during work hours and waiting for permission to ride" (Interview 16). Subsequently, their representatives approach workers with flyers to both persuade them to join the unions but also to highlight that they are part of a large group whose size can be a powerful factor in raising awareness for their conditions, and to "make them understand they are really a community" (Interview 16). In order to keep in constant contact with workers, unions run mobile chat groups where workers share information about their working conditions, including screenshots of messages from the respective platforms. Such chats provide important and immediate insights into platforms' work practices, as NIDIL's representative underlined, using the example of attempts to decrease workers' earnings per gig: "Glovo is cutting money on the single transaction, and [we] discovered it because [...] people were complaining and [started] sending the screenshots to one another" (Interview 16). This example also highlights the role of digital tools not just in facilitating platform work but in helping workers to organise and communicate with other workers and unions. In other words, unions do not solely engage in the institutionalised dialogue promoted by the city government, but they seek to improve working conditions through a variety of channels, all of which can ultimately impact the nature of app-based work in Milan.

While large trade unions have started to include and speak for platform workers, a more bottom-up development has consisted of the emergence of worker collectives, or groups of workers representing themselves. Examples include Deliverance Milano and Riders for Rights, which rely on social media to organise meetings and recruit members, the digitalisation expert highlighted: "In Milan, you can find this Facebook page that is called Deliverance Project or Riders for Rights" (Interview 1). Although this trend is not exclusive to Milan and can also be witnessed in other cities, for example Madrid, Milanese collectives are successful in organising local workers and gaining attention from the media. Indeed, it can be argued that they have been able to achieve their aim of raising public awareness. As the researcher on digitalisation further observed, "[...] the role of self-organised collectives is very strong. [...] All citizens are aware of the [...] hazards [of platform work]" (Interview 1), and the Covid-19 pandemic further increased their visibility (see Chapter 8). Still, traditional unions and more recent collectives are not entirely separate entities, and some of

the latter have agreed to “recognise CGIL as the main interlocutor” in local and national consultations with other stakeholders, NIDIL’s interviewee pointed out (Interview 16).

6.3.1.1 *The case of Milanese freelancers*

Freelancers are a group of workers that share some similarities with platform workers because they sometimes rely on platforms to sell own content and face similar work conditions. Responding to their concerns, the city government has pursued its approach of dialogue and funding, arguably with greater success than with other app-based workers. Milanese freelancers constitute a curious case compared to local platform workers because relations with other stakeholders appear to be less conflictual. The absence of tensions between platforms, freelancers, and the city government could stem from the way in which freelancers use platforms. Contrary to delivery riders, for example, where the platform determines essential features of a gig including pick-up and delivery location or payment amount, freelancers choose which service they offer and at what rate. They moreover are less prone to the health and safety risks of platform workers operating in urban spaces, therefore municipal actions of dialogue and funding are more effective at addressing their needs. Apart from holding a roundtable with freelance representatives – similar to the monthly dialogue on platform work – the municipality has supported freelancers by paying for their use of co-working spaces, thus promoting community-building among freelancers who would otherwise work at home. A representative of the Milanese freelance association ACTA elaborated on their interaction with City Hall: “[ACTA has] had some contacts and some exchanges with the Municipality of Milan, [...] holding a municipal desk for freelancers for a few years” (Interview 11). Furthermore, the researcher on atypical work described municipal support for freelancers as follows: “they support freelancing, helping them to pay for the co-working space, and at the same time [...] the co-working space was also a way to support freelancers meeting each other” (Interview 5). Due to these efforts, freelancers shared their views with the Milanese researcher “that the municipality is open to listen to them. [...] they perceive the municipality to be there and to be involved” (Interview 5). Other platform workers regarded municipal actions less favourably, however, as shown below. Generally, freelancers reflect the varied use of platforms in Milan and the different sets of needs and challenges different groups of platform workers face.

6.3.1.2 *Contrasting opinions on the municipality's role*

Opinions of stakeholders – freelancers, platform workers, and platforms – regarding the municipal position are mixed and at times diametrically opposed. On one hand, the local expert on atypical work concluded that city officials in the Department for Urban Economy and Employment are seen as “doing the best they can” (Interview 5), judging by feedback from freelancers and managers of co-working spaces, and considering the municipal lack of competences in labour affairs. This positive perception might again stem from the fact that freelancers do not have a relationship of dependence with platforms comparable to other app-based workers or comparable struggles concerning the legal classification of their employment status. Still, the local freelancers’ representative of ACTA saw greater potential for municipal support, for example by helping to “negotiate better work conditions” (Interview 11) in museums or during the organisation of events where the municipality provides funding:

“It would be useful for the municipality to intervene in activities related to culture and the organisation of events, where the role of the municipality is directly relevant [...] thanks also to the fact that these sectors (book publishing, newspapers, cinema, TV ...) benefit from important public support” (Interview 11).

On the other, some unions and workers’ representatives lamented the limited actions of the city government. Unions speaking on behalf of platform workers have been particularly critical, demanding greater initiative concerning public support as well as technical assistance. In the opinion of NIDIL’s interview participant, City Hall could use its reputation as “the smart Italian city” (Interview 16) – aware of its infrastructure, competitiveness, and purchasing power that attract platforms – to exert greater pressure on platforms by being more outspoken in favour of platform workers’ causes in the media: “they could have done way more, especially in terms of exposing themselves mediatically” (Interview 16). Furthermore, regarding technical assistance, his union would like to see the creation of “a network of small cycling mechanical shops” across Milan where riders can repair their equipment, especially while awaiting the realisation of the Riders Spot that could provide similar services. Hence, the overall impression of this representative was that municipal officials “do the least they can do to be OK with it” (Interview 16), fulfilling the bare minimum of municipal aspirations to promote the rights of precarious workers. The balance between inclusiveness and competitiveness explained in Section 6.1, exacerbated by pressures to be proactive as well as promote innovation and experimentation, reflects the

absence of a clear positioning in support of workers. Platforms' representatives do not appear content with the city's balanced approach either. Apart from Just Eat, their unwillingness to engage more constructively on the local level either individually or through their interest group AssoDelivery, as discussed below, can be seen as indication that they do not expect collaboration with the municipality to yield any satisfying contribution in support of their aims.

6.3.2 Platforms' presence on city level and engagement on national level

Despite the existence of the Italian interest group AssoDelivery representing several global platform companies in consultations with municipal and national policymakers in Italy, platforms have responded to regulatory and public pressure in different ways. Their various responses further add to the complexity of determinants shaping Milanese platform work. Generally, platforms' engagement in the policymaking processes has been marked by their desire to conduct consultations and negotiate any potential compromise with unions and policymakers on the national level. As the municipal Councillor stressed, "The platform companies, however, have always rejected the proposal for a territorial agreement [pertaining solely to Milan], postponing any interlocution on contracts and salaries to the national level" (Interview 12). Actions on the national level also include the negotiation of collective agreements between AssoDelivery and specific, smaller unions through which platforms make concessions to unions while defending the independent contractor model, as the researcher on digitalisation and labour law pointed out: "there are different collective agreements. [...] And there is a new agreement approved basically last October [2020] and signed by [AssoDelivery] and only one minor union" (Interview 1). However, these agreements have been contested "by the larger unions [such as CGIL and UIL], by academics, by scholars, by politicians", according to the same interview participant. In his view, this is because the agreements threaten to undermine efforts to create more comprehensive, nation-wide legal solutions providing entitlements to social benefits for platform workers.

The preference of platform representatives for engagement on the national level can be explained by several factors. Since they are not only present in Milan but also in other Italian cities, they have an interest in replicating their business model in order to realise economies

of scale: they might aim to achieve profitability through the uniform application of contracts across cities, instead of negotiating different agreements with respective municipalities in each. The desire to engage on national level could also stem from the attempt to pre-empt regulation of lower governmental levels, a widespread motivation among platform companies in the US, according to Wolf's (2022) study. Above all, platforms' reluctance to sign any agreements exclusively pertaining to platform workers in Milan reflects the distribution of competences, and the decisive role of the national Ministry of Labour in classifying workers and thus setting minimum standards of pay and benefits, as highlighted earlier.

Yet, not all platforms pursue the same vision of relationship with their workers. Most notably compared to other companies, the delivery service Just Eat decided to start hiring workers in Italy as employees instead of independent contractors from 2021. According to the company's annual report, the "employed courier model is the most sustainable, as evidenced by court judgments against the independent contractor model" (Just Eat Takeaway, 2020: n.p.). As a result, Just Eat has also been said to be more engaged in Milan's monthly roundtable compared to rival platforms, since it seeks to evaluate the progress in realising these changes and understand the reactions of other interest groups, according to NIDIL's representative: "the best relationship right now is with Just Eat because they are meeting [...] for an observatory to understand [...] how the process is going and how the actual realisation [of their business model] is being done" (Interview 16). Just Eat's decision to abandon the use of workers' independent contractor status common among platforms is most likely the product of different circumstances. One determinant could be the pressure of court rulings in several Italian cities, upholding that the relationship between platforms and their workers constitutes employment, as the annual report indicated. Arguably, Just Eat's turn towards regular contracts might also be seen as success of unions in shaping public perception. Platforms may slowly come to realise "how important it is to leverage the public opinion. [...] platforms really are interested in being perceived as good and ethical ones. So that's why, for example, Just Eat [has] decided to [employ workers]", NIDIL's interview participant believed (Interview 16).

In all, non-state actors enjoy powerful positions in discussions and processes shaping platform work governance in Milan. These positions are not only due to the openness of policymakers on municipal and national levels to include them in roundtables or

consultations, but also to their own abilities to organise into interest groups. Alas, non-state actors' ongoing discontent and the perceived insufficiency of municipal initiatives leave underlying tensions in the Milanese platform economy unresolved. The sustainability of that situation will be analysed in the final paragraphs of this chapter.

6.4 Discussion

This final section seeks to identify the power constellation emanating from the dynamics between policymakers, workers, and platform managers described above, and evaluate Milan's balanced approach towards platform work. It will address the possibility of regulating platforms on the Milanese municipal level, the risks of ignoring growing groups of more 'invisible' platform workers, and what other city governments can learn from the balanced approach.

6.4.1 Sharing power to steer platform work

The power constellation, or influence by different public and private actors in the governance of platform work, in Milan is unique compared to Madrid (Chapter 7) and San Francisco (Chapter 5). While app-based work governance in the Spanish capital is marked by a nationwide law and the municipality's reluctance to recommend platform work, San Francisco experiences the influence of capital-rich business interests undermining legal efforts to classify independent contractors as employees, in the context of a city government embracing platform work as remedy against poverty. In the Italian city, the four MLG indicators suggest a different MLG arrangement, resulting in a power constellation where a wider range of actors affects municipal governance processes on app-based work.

The municipality's approach to platform work represents a significant influence on that constellation. As discussed earlier, Milan's city government tends to adopt an interactive governance style for ideological and practical motives. From that perspective, platform work highlights municipal efforts to manage a small urban area within a complex metropolitan region whose development depends on structures and determinants beyond its control. The "multi-scalar and multifaceted city" of Milan is shaped by a "polyarchy of public and private

actors” (Di Vita, 2019: 286) inside and outside the municipal boundaries: surrounding provinces that supply workers, multinational corporations (among which one can include platforms) injecting their financial and technological capital, or higher governmental levels providing the regulatory framework. Such “inadequacy of the small municipality of Milan to manage by itself the dynamic urban growth” (Dell’Agnese et al., 2011: 222) could explain why municipal officials are eager to involve a range of interest groups in the implementation of economic and social policies, as Section 6.1 pointed out. This explanation seems relevant to its governance of platform urbanism as well. In the absence of comprehensive, legal means to promote the rights of local precarious workers, the city government reverts to dialogue and stakeholder engagement to affect change in policy areas where its formal powers are restricted but other actors can exert influence. This consequently transfers power to non-state actors: workers’ representatives are granted access to municipal consultations and invited to share their opinions and ideas for improvements of working conditions, while platforms are asked to cooperate and, for instance, finance the realisation of the Riders Spot. It needs to be asked, however, what effect the Milanese approach to app-based work produces for workers and their social protection, and whether the approach holds any value for other city governments. The final paragraphs will address this question.

6.4.2 Assessing the “precarious balance”

Earlier sections already alluded to the equilibrium City Hall seeks to strike between inclusiveness, or concerns about precarious workers, and competitiveness, or the city’s reputation for innovation. In that approach, Milan’s monthly roundtable with organised groups – unions, collectives, platforms – constitutes a significant element in the municipal management of platform urbanism. In terms of City Hall’s position, actions hence focus on ‘visible’ workers. This is because the roundtable consists of “social partners and platform companies”, the responsible municipal Councillor reported (Interview 12), thus excluding workers without any kind of formal organisation or representation.

Put differently, some groups of platform workers miss out on the opportunity to engage with other stakeholders, a phenomenon the interview participant studying digitalisation and labour law described as “dark side of visibility” (Interview 1). Due to their dispersed nature and ‘invisibility’, for example when working in homes, certain groups of workers cannot be

easily represented, either by their own initiatives or through the help of traditional unions. Workers in recently emerging platforms such as Helpling or WashOut, providing domestic cleaning of homes and cars, epitomise this challenge, the researcher on atypical work arrangements explained: “for example, Helpling, that it's a German platform [...] and for example for cleaners, housekeepers, there are exactly the same problems that riders are facing” (Interview 5). In contrast, delivery riders are easily visible due to their bikes and outfits as well as due to their tendency to congregate in public squares while waiting for the next gigs, a Milanese researcher on the sharing economy underlined: “those people working for Deliveroo, Glovo and UberEats [...] basically they are forced even to be a human commercial of the product because they wear the uniform etc” (Interview 3). Thus, riders or drivers are not only able to build relationships among themselves and potentially form collectives or organise protests, but unions can approach them to offer their experience and networks for representing them. This, in turn, allows them to partake in the monthly roundtable.

For more dispersed groups of workers, the Riders Spot could present an opportunity to both provide support to those lacking a representative interest group as well as capture their experiences and challenges working for platforms, yet its delay deprives them of that potential. Apart from the city government, the onus is also on trade unions to pay greater attention to less visible app-based workers, as the interview participant studying atypical work argued: “trade unions and [politicians] only care about what they see. If you need to have a jacket, a luminous jacket and go in the middle of the street to have someone caring about you, we have a problem” (Interview 5). Mapping and approaching invisible platform workers have proven challenging, however. NIDIL’s representative described the difficulty of representing them: “we are still trying to understand how to get to the workers of these new possible platforms” (Interview 16). Less visible app-based workers therefore rely on the efforts of unions to make their voices heard as the nature of the municipal roundtable excludes them from policymaking processes.

Why should the municipality and other stakeholders pay greater attention to such ‘invisible’ workers? According to the researcher on atypical work (Interview 5), an exclusive focus on the visible and better organised riders risks perpetuating existing inequalities. As workers in emerging platforms for housekeeping or cleaning tend to be female, their exclusion in consultations on municipal and higher governmental levels could result in changes of

policies or support mechanisms that purely benefit (predominantly male) groups of riders and drivers:

“research showed that cleaners or housekeepers are more, there is a higher number of this kind of professionals than riders, for example, and they face exactly the same problem and they have no contracts at all. They have safety and security problems [...]. But no one cares about them” (Interview 5).

The underrepresentation of certain groups of platform workers – either of certain platforms or certain demographic groups – points to a further issue that Milan’s balanced approach is unable to address, namely the distinct needs of various platform workers. As platforms continue to penetrate different economic sectors in the city, from food delivery to domestic services to high-paid freelance gigs, the question arises if composition and objectives of the roundtable sufficiently account for the needs and working conditions of growing groups of new and often dispersed platform workers. Such concern could lead to the conclusion that Milan’s City Hall should expand its conception of platform workers and invite domestic service platforms, and representatives of their workers, to the monthly roundtable. Alternatively, it could suggest that efforts to find a comprehensive solution regarding workers’ employment status on the national level should be expedited. These national efforts might be decisive in avoiding the continuation of the “precarious equilibrium” where the success of municipal measures has depended on the willingness of non-state actors to realise them, and where City Hall might have been reluctant to take bolder steps in favour of workers.

In any case, there is one important lesson that can be drawn from Milan’s proactive, balanced approach towards steering platform work, namely the availability of various policy tools city governments can deploy in support of workers. These tools concern changes in transportation policy, enforcement of health and safety standards, dialogue with stakeholders, and one-stop-shops such as the Riders Spot. Hence, a lack of competences in labour or social security law does not excuse inaction on a municipality’s part, since some useful instruments do exist. Yet, attention needs to be paid to groups of workers who lack capabilities to organise, mobilise, and thus participate in consultations.

6.5 Conclusion

The MLG arrangement in Milan's case reflects a combination of widespread platform work, strong unions, well-organised platform companies, a proactive municipality seeking to promote both workers' rights and business interests, and the concentration of labour competences at the national government. The absence of a nation-wide solution covering all platform workers and pressure from other innovative Italian municipalities give further urgency to manage the social tensions created by app-based work on the city level and empower locally present non-state actors in the formulation and implementation of municipal responses. Yet, the growth of less visible types of platform work point to the need for greater consideration of the needs of workers that have thus far been excluded from governance processes due to the dispersed nature of their activities. Milan's case study has therefore highlighted the trade-off between inclusiveness and competitiveness, the challenge of platform work beyond its most visible forms, and the difficulty of resolving the lack of workers' rights on the urban level. By comparing them with the findings from the cases of Madrid and San Francisco, these are some of the themes that will be addressed in the discussion chapter (Chapter 9). The analysis of empirical findings now turns to the case study of Madrid's municipal response.

7. Case study of Madrid – no urgency amid Spain’s national solution

This is the final of three case studies investigating with which instruments, and in what context, city governments respond to the growth of platform work. The approach of Madrid’s municipality (*Ayuntamiento de Madrid*) is characterised by an absence of engagement with other stakeholders and a preoccupation with precarity and underemployment in the local labour market. Despite the municipal department responsible for labour affairs explicitly refusing to consider platform work as option for local jobseekers, it does not discount the possibility of accepting gigs once the conditions of that type of work become better regulated through nation-wide laws. Compared to other countries, such regulation has indeed been introduced in Spain, though repercussions on the conditions of platform workers have yet to manifest themselves: while interviews were conducted during the first half of 2021, the national ‘Rider Law’ entered into force in August 2021. Importantly, though, the analytical framework offered by multi-level governance (MLG) reveals that Madrid’s policy outcome results from a particular MLG arrangement, or the city-specific values of the four MLG indicators. Governmental and non-state actors position themselves in reaction to the Rider Law, while the absence of stricter intervention on regional and municipal governmental levels does not indicate reluctance to act but rather their limited scope for action.

Subjecting the empirical data gathered via interviews and policy documents to the four MLG indicators (1. roles, views, and involvement of non-state actors; 2. relationship between governmental levels regarding platform work; 3. availability of competences and instruments on municipal level; and 4. involvement of the municipality in the policy debate on platform work), this chapter will analyse the city government’s position on platform work in four steps. Focusing on indicators 3 and 4, the first section will elaborate on the municipal policy outcome in question and examine motivations and economic circumstances that inform officials’ concerns about precarious and intermittent work conditions, which they seek to curb. Section 7.2 will consider indicator 2 and discuss how the roles of different governmental levels – national, regional, and municipal – are fundamentally shaped by the Spanish Rider Law, leaving the sub-national levels with limited influence over platform work. The regional government has chosen to act as mediator between platform workers and the national government but, just as the municipality, holds no formal competences that

could impact platform work. Meanwhile, the city government's role in legislative efforts is confined, and accepted by municipal officials, to being a pilot city where the law's effects will become visible. This hierarchical governmental structure will also be shown to influence the leeway of non-state actors, concretely workers' representatives and platform companies, in Section 7.3. Despite being well organised through unions and collectives on one hand, and through business interest groups on the other, non-state stakeholders are forced to engage on governmental levels other than the municipal one or resort to tools outside the policy arena. The discussion in Section 7.4 will evaluate the power constellation emanating from this combination of factors and argue that Madrid's City Hall demonstrates cities' potential scope for action in platform work governance even when the national administration takes the lead in tackling precarity of workers.

Overall, the city government's refusal to lead jobseekers towards app-based work, also in times of high unemployment, constitutes a simple yet significant step to mitigate precarious work in the face of limited competences. Since that response does not require cooperation or consent of other governmental and non-state actors, it is easily instituted, even if work conditions on platforms continue to go unaddressed. Therefore, the municipality's response to its constrained role in the complex governance of platform work is a tool that avoids any interaction, and potential conflict, with other stakeholders. Lastly, it will be suggested that the readiness of Madrid's City Hall to consider such work as option for unemployed residents – following national regulation or platforms' own improvements of workers' social entitlements – could point towards a possible future of platform urbanism in which platforms assimilate their incumbent counterparts. This trend would represent a 'normalisation' of platform companies, according to Mokyr et al.'s (2015) possible scenarios for the platform economy.

7.1 Concerned but constrained: municipal actions and priorities

Madrid's officials responsible for setting the municipal labour and employment strategy have responded to the growth of platform work by not recommending it to jobseekers. This policy outcome results from a combination of underlying local factors, above all the preoccupation about precarious work conditions in the local labour market, the absence of perceived trade-off between innovation and workers' rights, the targeting of employers

instead of workers in municipal measures, and officials' focus on policy areas where the city government holds competences. Thus, Madrid's municipality, though aware of the prevalence of app-based work, neither engages in debates surrounding the issue nor regards it as urgent concern. The absence of stricter intervention by the city government should not be understood as reluctance to act, however. Instead, it reflects the limited leeway for action set by Spain's Rider Law – explored in Section 7.2 – and the municipal focus on other policy priorities.

7.1.1 Municipal response to platform work

Within Madrid's municipality, the office responsible for labour affairs is the so-called Employment Agency (*Organismo Autónomo Agencia para el Empleo de Madrid*). As two of its representatives elaborated during an interview,

“Employment Agency of City Council of Madrid is the public body [...] in charge of the employment policy in the city of Madrid. [...] we decide our action plan in order to the needs of the city hall. So, and also we are now linked to a department of the city hall [...] some years we have been linked to social services, but now we are linked to innovation and economic area” (Interview 17).

The Deputy Minister for Employment of Madrid's regional government (*Comunidad de Madrid*) confirmed the agency's central role in Madrid's labour market policies while, though an autonomous agency, being partly financed by the regional government: “in the case of employment they have a special institution, this local agency, the employment local agency. And the question is that we give the money to them for doing the actions” (Interview 13). The agency's broad objective is to support local jobseekers “who have no resources and have more problems to access the labour market”, in the words of the agency's representatives (Interview 17).

The Employment Agency's response to platform work consists of not recommending such work to jobseekers due to officials' concern about its precarious nature. Generally, the perception of platform work among municipal officials in Madrid's Employment Agency suggests awareness of both the potential it holds for jobseekers but also its role in perpetuating work insecurity. On one hand, the agency's interview participants underlined

the positive contribution of the platform economy in job creation: “Obviously these platforms are generating many, many jobs, but we have not many data about that” (Interview 17). Furthermore, platform work would benefit people who otherwise find it difficult to access more regular employment, according to these municipal officials: “this is the best way to enter the labour market, probably for migrants, or for young people” (Interview 17). In fact, both representatives hinted at the possibility of leading jobseekers towards app-based jobs in the future, provided that respective regulation mitigates the vulnerability and precarity perpetuated by the platform economy. They suggested that, “from the point of view of the Employment Agency, what we can do is to consider these platforms as an issue of employment, and to use it for our clients and to offer as a possibility when this will be regulated” (Interview 17). The representatives also saw scope for supporting jobseekers in navigating the platform economy, or helping them to use the platform model for their own businesses: “another thing that the *Agencia para el Empleo* could also do is to provide training to [...] those who wants [sic] to work in this type of jobs, training regarding how to manage platforms, digital trainings, also maybe to help those who [...] want to create companies” (Interview 17).

Table 11: Selected economic indices of Madrid.

Economic index	Value
Unemployment rate (2019)	10.0%
Youth unemployment rate (2021)	23.7%
GDP per capita in Madrid (2019)	€36,206
GDP per capita in Spain (2019)	€26,440
Population (2020)	3,286,662
Number of residents experiencing homelessness (2017)	1,841

Data sources: Datosmacro, Imperial College London (2017), Ayuntamiento de Madrid (2022).

Nonetheless, the awareness of the potential for platforms to address high unemployment – around 10% in 2019 (Table 11) – has not translated into a more open or permissive stance of City Hall, because of concerns about underemployment in the labour market. Although platform work is often considered to facilitate access to labour markets, a priority for the Employment Agency, the agency still does not regard such work as opportunity for Madrid’s unemployed: “in our case, we have to take care of the labour conditions, because some of

these jobs are precarious” (Interview 17). The representatives further elaborated on their motivations not to recommend gigs to jobless residents: “it's very difficult to offer a precarious job for people who are in a precarious way of life, in a vulnerable situation.” Put differently, municipal officials fear that leading jobseekers towards platform work could promulgate pre-existing precarity. This stance is owed to the preoccupation about the labour market's dual nature, discussed next, and by a concern about an additional increase in underemployment driven by platform work. Documents outlining measures by the Employment Agency, which aim to combat intermittency, equally reflect such preoccupation (Agencia para el Empleo, 2020).

7.1.2 Madrid's economic vulnerabilities

Interviews revealed that the preoccupation among city officials concerning unemployment and underemployment stems from the urban economic context. Madrid's local labour market presents itself in both positive and negative light. Regarding its strengths, the growing gap between indefinite and temporary contracts is not as problematic as in other Spanish cities, according to a researcher on precarity: “we have some of the outliers like Madrid and they have good levels of indefinite contracts” (Interview 8). An academic expert in Spanish labour law confirmed that temporary contracts are rarer in the city compared to the rest of Spain, despite the high share of jobs in local service sectors accounting for 90% of all jobs (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2020): “Madrid is leading basically high value added sector services. So in these sectors, I mean, informaticians, consultants, the banking sector, banking industry, they are not using this type of contract too much” (Interview 6). This specialisation in higher skilled, better remunerated service sectors reflects above-average economic growth compared to the rest of Spain (BBVA, 2019) and above-average GDP per capita (Table 11).

Regarding the labour market's challenges, temporary contracts still represent a considerable, though comparatively smaller, share of new employment in Madrid. Generally, Spain has long been characterised by a dual labour market, as a researcher on precarity stated: “in the case of Spain, it's clear that we have a problem first with [...] duality in the labour market between temporary and indefinite contracts” (Interview 8). In his view, the duality constitutes a “problem”, since many Spanish workers are employed on part-time contracts and thus miss out on social benefits whose amount increases through regular contributions.

The regional Deputy Minister stressed the challenge of poverty created by temporary contracts in the Spanish capital, despite the introduction of a minimum wage: “we have a very important problem with poor workers. There are a lot of people that receive a minimum salary or perhaps if you have a part-time contract, you get a, I don't know, five hundred [Euros]. And, you know, Madrid, for example, it is so expensive” (Interview 13).

Moreover, local unemployment and poverty rates are higher than in many European cities. A representative of the Employment Agency remarked, “I mean, Berlin or Stockholm or others, their figures are very low, so they need to focus just, I don't know, on five percent of the population looking for a job. We are dealing with 13 and more, 14 percent” (Interview 17). In addition, Spain has suffered from high unemployment rates over the past decade, as the regional Deputy Minister underlined: “in Spain [...] the unemployment rate is so, so, so big” (Interview 13). She further highlighted a particular challenge concerning youth unemployment, not just in Spain but also in Madrid: “the average of [youth] unemployment is next to 30 percent in Madrid, but in Spain it is next to 40. It's horrible” (Interview 13).

7.1.3 Tackling precarity in the urban labour market

Considering Madrid's economic context, both unemployment and underemployment are key priorities of the Employment Agency, and its policies are designed accordingly. Interestingly, the focus of municipal measures targets employers, not workers. Apart from offering the more traditional approach of skills training to individuals, the agency seeks to encourage firms to make greater use of full-time contracts, as a researcher on precarity highlighted: “you should help to the firms in order to generate employment [...] is a summary of this type of message that they are developing in the Madrid [city] government” (Interview 8). He further elaborated on how that approach works in practice:

“They are giving monetary help to firms directly in order to contract. They are giving some facilities and creating new working places for start-ups for young. That is the main difference that we have here in Madrid in comparison to other cities in Spain. And I think the good results that the region of Madrid have in comparison with the rest of the regions are based on this type of [...] improvements more directed to the firm than the employee, that was surprising us because we were thinking the opposite” (Interview 8)

Municipal policy documents support the interviewee's quote. Measures to address the weaknesses of Madrid's labour market aim to promote "stable and dignified jobs" (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2018: 22) – responding to the challenge of underemployment – and include support for local businesses that hire employees on permanent contracts (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2020). The Employment Agency's Action Plan (Agencia para el Empleo, 2020: 52) sets out the details of support mechanisms for these firms, subsidising businesses based in Madrid that hire unemployed residents for at least six months – a considerable difference to the length of many temporary contracts in the Spanish economy, which are increasingly limited to less than a month or week (Garcia-Perez et al., 2018). In this aspect, the municipal position is aligned with aims and strategies of the regional government, which above all pursues the objective of creating "stable, quality employment" (Comunidad de Madrid, 2018: 4) and promotes the provision of financial incentives to firms using permanent rather than temporary contracts (Comunidad de Madrid, 2018: 48).

Yet, considering its concerns about underemployment in the local labour market, it has to be asked why the Employment Agency does not put more emphasis on improving the conditions of platform work, one purported driver of underemployment (European Parliament, 2016). App-based work partly mirrors the circumstances of other temporary jobs and reflects the working conditions of app-based workers in other countries. Platform work shares certain characteristics of temporary contracts concerning irregularity and intermittency yet misses the limited social benefits they create. A researcher on unions and platforms explained that,

"to some extent, they are functionally equivalent, obviously there is a basic key difference that is in the short term contracts being part time or temporary contracts, they have some, though limited protection in the sense that at least you [...] are kind of contributing to have, for instance, unemployment insurance, etc" (Interview 7).

Previous research (Corujo, 2017) confirms the challenges of app-based jobs in Spain, leaving workers with little social protection as they are not automatically registered with Spanish social security compared to other temporary workers.

Crucially, interview participants agreed that Madrid is one of two main Spanish cities of platform work, as noted by a municipal official of the city's Employment Agency, "Madrid is one of the cities with more people working in those platforms" (Interview 17), and by a

researcher on precarity: “[Madrid and Barcelona are] the two cities where platform work is more widespread in Spain” (Interview 7). However, interviewees were unable to provide exact numbers of the group of workers concerned, perhaps due to its use in more and less visible sectors, including groceries delivery and domestic cleaning, respectively. On the question of how many platform workers operate in Madrid, the researcher on precarity shared his observation that the phenomenon has recently been rising due to the pandemic, starting from elevated levels:

“that's a key question that we don't know really how to answer. [...] my guess is that they are really important. I mean, amongst European countries, it seemed to be really important before the covid pandemic and it has grown with the pandemic. So it's very hard to [...] estimate, say, the number of [...] workers in platforms or the contribution to GDP [but] it's not so marginal as we thought” (Interview 7).

Adigital (Adigital, 2019), an interest group representing Spanish businesses in IT and digital sectors, including the largest platform companies, cited a study by Huws that found that 17% of Spain’s working age population execute work through platforms at least once a week. In another report (Adigital, 2020), Adigital estimated the number of delivery riders across the entire country to be around 29,000. While this number is lower than respective figures for San Francisco and Milan, it likely understates the true extent of app-based work. This is because the estimate does not account for other types of platform workers, and it does not capture the growth of platform work during the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, academic studies (Ardura Urquiaga et al., 2019; De La Poza et al., 2020) support the argument that Spanish cities are major hubs for platform services. Meanwhile, the interest group estimates that platforms are used by 4.7 million Spanish customers (Adigital, 2020).

One part of the answer for why the municipality does not act on platforms’ contribution to underemployment lies in the distribution of competences, which puts labour law initiatives into the hands of Spain’s national government. As Section 7.2 will show, nation-wide pushes towards regulating platform work have indeed produced major regulatory measures in the Spanish platform economy, in contrast to other countries, which in turn lessen the perceived necessity for action on different governmental levels. Thus, the municipality might first await not just the concrete implementation of national regulation but also its impacts on the city’s platform economy and platform workforces, before designing local policies in response.

7.1.4 Neither trade-off nor urgency

Yet, apart from the scope of Spain's Rider Law, there are also more ideological reasons for why the city government does not take greater action on platform work in favour of either workers or platforms. In short, officials from the Employment Agency do not recognise a need to intervene, even though they would not be opposed to regulation. For one, platform work is not seen as expression of innovation that ought to be promoted. While other cities can find themselves walking a fine line between innovation and workers' rights and might hence be more reluctant to demand or promote greater protection of platform workers – the previous two case studies demonstrated this challenge as well – the city government of Madrid interestingly does not reflect such tension. Members of the Employment Agency did not expect rising unemployment resulting from stricter regulation of platforms, and policy documents did not reveal a perceived trade-off between allowing platform innovation and protecting workers either. “The needs are there, and I think this is not going to change because consumers have this need, and for business too, because some of them, in Madrid, we have a lot of restaurants [...] that benefits from this type of work. [...] That's why even if you regulate that activity, it doesn't disappear”, representatives of the agency believed (Interview 17).

One reason for such view could be that the platform economy and related opportunities for work and consumption are simply not perceived as primary expressions of innovation by policymakers in the municipality. Compared to Milan, where any steps towards regulating platform work are feared to damage the city's reputation as entrepreneurial and innovative hub (Chapter 6), interview participants did not express such concerns in Madrid. This view might be linked to the belief among policymakers that the extent of platforms and their externalities are relatively insignificant compared to Barcelona or other cities. Previous research (Ardura Urquiaga et al., 2019) has shown that municipal officials do not perceive any urgency regarding the regulation of the platform economy, because Madrid would not be “as bad as Barcelona” (ibid.: 2) in terms of the negative externalities of platforms, for example gentrification and rent increases driven by flat-sharing apps. The same study has found that such lack of urgency delayed the introduction of city-wide rules for Airbnb and related platforms. Interviews confirmed the impression that a similar attitude concerning platform work prevails among policymakers, as a quote by representatives of the

Employment Agency suggested, stating that they “[did not] think it's something trendy”, or urgent (Interview 17).

The City Hall’s institutional structure, which places the responsible Employment Agency apart from municipal sections tasked with the promotion of business activities, further reinforces the distinction between business and innovation. Though incorporated within the broader department for Economy, Innovation and Employment (*Area de Gobierno de Economía, Innovación y Empleo*) of Madrid’s city government, as interviewees of the agency pointed out (Interview 17), the agency is assigned the status of autonomous entity (*Organismo Autónomo*). In practice, this autonomy becomes visible in how its officials set local employment policy: “we are autonomous. Every year we [...] make an activity plan but it is made by the Employment Agency in an autonomous way” (Interview 17). This institutional setup contrasts with San Francisco, for example, where one single municipal department (OEWD) is responsible for both promoting workers’ rights while attracting large businesses. As Chapter 5 discussed, such dual mandate has tended to favour the interests of the latter.

Lately, the circumstances of the pandemic, leading to higher unemployment and rising use of short-term contracts, have reinforced the city government’s focus on different issues: “the great priority of the city hall now regarding the unemployed people and the employment situation is the transformation and the [...] reskilling of the unemployed” (Interview 17). The agency’s Action Plan (*Agencia para el Empleo, 2020: 5*) underlined the priority of “upskilling and reskilling” of Madrid’s workforce for the municipality as well. In other words, the pandemic exacerbated and brought to the fore pre-existing challenges of the city’s labour market, and in turn justified the city government’s focus on underemployment and unemployment. A separate chapter on the pandemic’s effects on platform work (Chapter 8) will elaborate on this development.

One interview participant, a researcher on precarity and platform work, shared his explanation of why policymakers might de-prioritise the vulnerabilities surrounding app-based jobs: “we are [concerned] in the academia about precariousness, but maybe politicians are more [...] focussed on concepts like inequality, poverty, that are the last consequence of precariousness” (Interview 8). This statement appears to reflect the stance of Madrid’s City

Hall. Interview participants and policy documents suggested concerns among municipal officials about challenges which – though not directly associated with platform work by officials – can be said to be related to such work. Since the municipality targets underemployment and short-term contracts in its employment strategy, its policies are likely to affect platform work as well, even if indirectly and unintentionally. The city government aims to create a higher number of permanent contracts and thus offer workers alternatives to part-time jobs (Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2018; Agencia para el Empleo, 2020), including app-based work. For the sake of the argument, it should be noted, though, that the working conditions on platforms still go largely unaddressed, namely for those workers who deliberately choose platforms as job opportunity despite their use of part-time, precarious arrangements. In all, platform work constitutes neither a challenge nor, for the time being, an opportunity in the eyes of municipal officials. It is not a challenge because the Spanish national administration has chosen to tackle its insecure conditions, and it is not an opportunity as long as the national law does not create tangible effects for app-based workers and mitigates their precarity, which the municipality seeks to curb. The following section analyses the city government’s role in the governmental hierarchy on platform work, finding a clear distinction between national, regional, and municipal levels regarding their involvement in its governance.

Table 12: Roles of governmental levels in Madrid’s platform work governance (MLG indicator 2).

Governmental level	Key departments or officials	Role in platform work governance
Supranational	European Commission, European Council	Potential EU directive on classification of platform workers as employees proposed by the European Commission in December 2021, though negotiations between EU member states are ongoing
National	Ministry of Labour and Social Economy	Nation-wide 2021 Rider Law classifying app-based workers as employees
Regional	Deputy Minister for Employment	Consultations with platform workers’ representatives, though no formal legislative influence on labour or social security law
Municipal	Madrid Employment Agency	Refusing the recommendation of platform work to jobseekers

7.2 A higher power: effects of Spain's Rider Law on other governmental levels

Spain is one of few countries where the national government has introduced legislation to address the misclassification of platform workers as self-employed. On the issue of platform work, the resulting relationship between the various governmental levels is hierarchical with distinct roles for each layer: while the regional government contributes opinions and conclusions to the national Labour Ministry, due to the Deputy Minister's personal initiative, Madrid's municipal government's role in the governance of platform work is confined to being a pilot city for the Rider Law. Table 12 summarises the role of each governmental level. Later sections will demonstrate how this structure shapes roles and influence of non-state actors as well.

7.2.1 Spain's national government as European role model

Conditions of platform work in Madrid depend on legislative proposals by the national Labour Ministry, which have attracted attention for their potentially far-reaching scope. Until recently, Spanish platform workers faced a legally uncertain situation regarding the classification of their employment relationship with platform companies, and thus concomitant rights, similar to other countries. A researcher on precarity pointed to the challenge of defining the relationship between platforms and their workers: "Is it a false freelance, is a freelance? What is that? We have not here in Spain a good definition" (Interview 8). Contradictory rulings of different Spanish courts have not contributed to a clarification of platform workers' status (Forbes, 2019). Another interview participant, specialised in labour law, suggested that Spanish app-based workers were wrongly considered self-employed since they would depend on platforms to provide access to retailers and customers: "they are using [...] false self-employees because they are [...] working just with one company, with one position" (Interview 6). Faux self-employment of these workers has previously been attested in other platform economies as well (Palier, 2019; Warhurst et al., 2019). In response to such legal uncertainty, the national Labour Ministry proposed the 'Rider Law' (*Ley Rider*), as it is commonly called. The nation-wide law, which was passed by parliament in May and entered into force in August 2021, requires delivery platforms – or companies offering "distribution of any consumer product [...] through a

digital platform” – to classify their workers as employees instead of independent contractors (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2021: 56733). It also obliges platforms to share the details of algorithms and AI software used to assign gigs.

Why has Spain’s government led the way in terms of regulation? According to the official legal document (ibid.: 56733), the Rider Law aims to create the legal framework in which “the technological revolution contributes its positive effects in an equitable way and results in the progress of the society in which it has been installed”. In other words, lawmakers justify the law as means to ensuring that not only consumers but also workers benefit from the rise in delivery services of platform companies. Another perhaps more likely explanation could be the concern about rising costs of the country’s social security system. Spanish social security depends on the contributions of employers and employees, a model that has been found to experience increasing financial deficits due to the rise of app-based gigs, according to a study by Corujo (2017). The same study reached the conclusion that country-wide reforms were inevitable in the face of expanding groups of platform workers. A court case of Spain’s social security agency against platform companies due to platforms’ alleged failure to pay social security contributions (Forbes, 2019) equally reflects the preoccupation that the growth of gig work deprives the Spanish welfare state of an important source of revenue, forcing state legislators to act. One interview participant, a researcher on precarity, hinted at that challenge as well: “Everything with the welfare state, even if you are talking about the pension system, [...] is related with employment, if we have not an employment with good conditions, we cannot make our welfare state sustainable” (Interview 8).

However, initial reactions to the new law were mixed. Interview participants described the discontent of platform workers with the nation-wide law: “some associations of riders or people who work in platforms didn't want this law because they prefer to be autonomous and to be flexible” (Interview 17), an impression that was shared by the regional Deputy Minister for Labour Affairs, as described further below. Another report (Politico Magazine, 2021), meanwhile, explained the discontent of workers’ representatives, for example trade union UGT and collective ‘*Riders Por Derechos*’, by the law’s limited scope. Although UGT expressed its support for the law and its hope that the law could alleviate some of the vulnerabilities faced by workers, the union believed it would not go far enough (UGT, 2021). The law’s exclusive application to couriers and delivery workers would ignore other types

of platform workers in similarly precarious conditions, thus not fully mitigating the underlying precarity of many gigs.

By mid-2021, at the time when qualitative interviews were conducted, Spain's Rider Law had not brought any changes to Madrid's platform economy, as an earlier quote by the members of the municipal Employment Agency indicated. This was because the law, though passed in May 2021, only entered into force three months later. Consequently, any effects on Madrid's platform economy in general and workers' conditions in particular remain to be seen, for example in terms of compliance of companies. Early reports (Social Europe, 2021; Hooker et al., 2022) indicated that some platforms have started to subcontract delivery riders to avoid rising labour costs resulting from the legal changes, yet the ultimate effect on workers' rights has yet to manifest. Crucially, in terms of governance, Spain's nation-wide approach leaves lower governmental levels in less influential roles. Madrid's regional government has chosen to act as channel for workers' interests, while City Hall accepts its role as pilot city for the Rider Law's effects on the local platform economy.

7.2.2 Madrid's regional government mediates between workers and the state

The government of the Autonomous Region of Madrid (*Comunidad de Madrid*) occupies a role in Madrid's platform urbanism as mediator between workers and the national government, even though it does not hold labour law competences that could target working conditions. Nonetheless, single actors, concretely the Deputy Minister for Labour Affairs, have chosen to play a more active role. The Deputy Minister explained the distribution of competences between the three levels of municipal, regional, and national governments as follows: "the problem in Spain is that we have the state competence, the autonomy's competence and the competence of the municipality. And in some cases, we do the same things, there [is] a lot of [duplication] in policies", further stressing that in labour and employment affairs, "in our case it is only administration, no legislation" (Interview 13). Responsibilities of the region thus mainly pertain to the operation of job centres, training of certain groups of employed workers, and collective bargaining (Interview 13). It also provides funding to programmes of the municipal Employment Agency.

Still, the Deputy Minister has become involved in debates surrounding the regulation of platform work, both because workers' representatives have approached her, and because she has been open to meet with them due to her background as former university professor in labour law. Unions' eagerness to talk to her might also stem from the regional government's involvement in collective bargaining, thus making use of an existing forum between officials and workers. She explained that:

“They asked for [...] a meeting. [...] we don't have the competence of legislation, but perhaps this is because I am a professor but I often try to agree to meet with expert people and try to write some conclusions about different questions of labour market, and then I send to the [national labour] minister” (Interview 13).

Put differently, she acts as mediator or gatekeeper for workers who collects their views and sends her “conclusions” to the Spanish Labour Ministry. This mechanism has come to play an important communication channel for them, since their representatives have had difficulties getting involved in policymaking processes on national level, the deputy minister underlined: “the state government has decided not to listen to [platform workers' associations]” (Interview 13). A researcher on unions and platforms explained that reluctance to engage with workers' representatives as result of the traditionally weak position of unions in consultations with the national government: “Spain is different in that at the end of the day, you know, collective bargaining is not so vibrant as it is in the Nordic countries” (Interview 7).

Concerning the nature of Spain's Rider Law, the deputy minister took a sceptical view of its effectiveness. From her conversations with workers' representatives, she gathered the impression that the new law was unlikely to meet the expectations and needs of platform workers: “in the two last months, I have spoken to different riders associations and these associations ask [...] to be self-employed worker.” (Interview 13). The wish to be considered self-employed would stem from the flexibility such classification would allow for, in her view: “there are a lot of people that decide to work in this area for freedom [...] and these associations decide to go out to the street or revindicate the rights, but the right not like [employees], the right like self-employment” (Interview 13). Not only would nation-wide regulation leave workers' needs unfulfilled, but the deputy minister even feared that it could lead to the disappearance of platforms and ultimately higher unemployment: “a lot of platforms will close for the reason, because they have to pay more money, have to pay the contributions to social security [...]. And these people will lose their employment. I think

it's better [...] that the labour market decides alone. But I suppose that it is not the idea of this [national] government” (Interview 13). She thus believed that platform work could help alleviate pressure from Madrid’s labour market – “I think that is an opportunity” – and that new regulation would not be required to clarify the employment relationship between platforms and workers: “If you have a doubt about if a relation is a labour one or not, then go to court, and let the court decide what happens.” Although her and therefore the regional government’s objections to the Rider Law do not have formal implications, her thoughts mirror part of the discontent of workers indicated earlier. Therefore, the absence of regulatory action on regional level should not be seen as result of the Deputy Minister’s view of platform work, who was in favour of a more free-market, laissez-faire approach. Instead, such absence reflects the lack of competence in the face of the Rider Law. This factor can also explain why the regional elections held in May 2021 were seen as unlikely to alter the regional government’s role in the governance of platform work, as the Deputy Minister explained: “I was very worried about [the election result], but [...] Not for questions of labour market. Because, you know, that in our case it is only administration” (Interview 13).

7.2.3 The municipality’s place in the governmental hierarchy

On the municipal level, the city government plays a subordinated role in platform work governance, and other Spanish municipalities are not perceived as creating competition that could push City Hall towards greater intervention either. First, city officials regard Madrid’s role in debates surrounding the Rider Law as pilot city where its consequences on workers and platforms become visible. Representatives of Madrid’s Employment Agency saw the law’s significance in its potential as blueprint that could influence regulation of platform work in other cities around the world:

“in the case of our law, that will be [...] an inspiration for others. And we will be a pilot, probably, a pilot for how this law works and how other cities or other countries can take example of this, so all the good points or their worst points. Maybe in one year or two years, depending on how the law is implemented, we can have some insights of what works and what doesn't work” (Interview 17).

Therefore, Madrid is a testing ground for the real-life implications of national legislation. This is not a formally assigned role or one that requires the active involvement of city officials. Madrid was not designated a pilot city by the national administration, but municipal

officials see Madrid's role as such. In the future, one might assume that municipal departments might be asked by higher authorities to evaluate the law's repercussions or report to the Labour Ministry, yet at the time of data collection, such potential did not emerge from interviews or documents.

Second, on the municipal level competition between Spanish cities over which one tackles tensions arising from platform work most effectively is absent. Unlike Milan (Chapter 6), where the city government feels the need to engage with workers and go further than the Italian Labour Ministry following the lead of other Italian municipalities, especially Bologna and Turin, pressure on the municipal level is irrelevant for Madrid's stance. This can be explained in relation to the belief among city officials that other cities, above all Barcelona, are more heavily affected by the externalities of the platform economy, as shown in Section 7.1. The municipality hence is not granted a more influential position in legislative processes concerning the classification of platform workers or their entitlement to social benefits, nor do its officials recognise any urgency to meet ambitions of other Spanish city governments concerning measures that protect workers' interests. Spain's nationwide law shapes scope and expectations of what both Madrid's regional government and City Hall can do and, the next section will argue, also determines how non-state actors attempt to influence the governance of platform work.

7.3 Well represented yet excluded: the limited role of non-state actors

Through the formation of alliances, both groups of platform workers and platform companies have created paths to voice their views. Nonetheless, in the face of the hierarchical governance structure that concentrates actions on platform work on the national level, their efforts to influence the conditions of app-based work in Madrid have yielded only limited success. As result of both necessity and intent, they are confined to engagement with higher governmental levels or use of alternative instruments outside the policy arena.

7.3.1 Platform workers' organisation through collectives and cooperatives

Local platform workers have become well-organised actors in the public conversation on the future and regulation of platform work. While one study (Pulignano et al., 2016) attested the lack of their representation through Spain's traditional labour unions as recently as 2016, workers have since then been able to both organise into interest groups and challenge platforms' business model, as the following paragraphs will demonstrate. Still, the nature of governance structure does not grant workers' representatives significant influence over governmental responses to app-based work.

7.3.1.1 *Workers seeking representation*

According to a researcher on unions and the platform economy, the growing representation of Madrid's platform workers has been the result of two approaches. First, established trade unions increasingly paid attention to these workers and supported them in enforcing existing labour laws or proving their misclassification as self-employed:

“The most representative trade unions in Spain that is Comisiones Obreras and [Unión General de Trabajadores], they always kind of adopt [...] a position according to which these workers should be considered dependent employees. [...] Basically, for them, the path to be followed in order to help those workers was to have them to go to the judicial system and make them recognise that you are dependent workers.”
(Interview 7)

Additionally, unions are accepting platform workers as members, the researcher further explained: “they have developed some strategies [...] to incorporate them into the trade union structure. So this is happening more recently and trade unions are now making more efforts in order to integrate these workers.” Second, some unions have helped organise platform workers into their own collectives or interest groups:

“The other approach that was adopted by other, we can call them smaller trade unions, was to organise them. So or at least help them to [...] get organised, and this was the approach, for instance, followed by trade unions like DGT, whereby they try to, you know, go to these workers using, for instance, their meeting points and talk to them on helping to organise campaigns to demonstrate and even help them to, you know, form their own organisations like [...] Riders Por Derechos, Asso Riders”, the researcher elaborated (Interview 7).

Overall, he shared his surprise concerning the success of this approach: “smaller trade unions or alternative trade unions representing the riders have also been quite successful, I would say in representing their interests, making them visible and making visible their problems. [...] I didn't expect that will be so successful as they have been.” The Covid-19 pandemic, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8, further contributed to strengthening their influence in the discourse, the researcher believed: “I think the pandemic has helped them to, you know, to really visualise the problems, the important role they play, just as other workers like health workers, etc., the riders have been kind of recognised as an important worker in the economy” (Interview 7).

One way of representing their interests consists of attempts to approach different administrative levels, even if they are limited to the regional government of Madrid, which holds no relevant labour law competences, as explained earlier. The Deputy Minister pointed out that these collectives “try [to speak] with different parties, with different governments [in Spain] and trying to get people to say, OK, I am going to support you, this is the idea” (Interview 13). They hence seek to exert pressure on policymaking processes through other actors, persuading various stakeholders who could communicate their concerns or demands to relevant authorities, such as the Labour Ministry. Comparable interaction is absent on national and municipal level, since neither is open to engage with them, and the city administration does not have sufficient influence on the Rider Law to be an attractive cooperation or conversation partner for these collectives.

7.3.1.2 *Challenging platforms' business model: the rise of platform cooperatives*

The difficulty of influencing political mechanisms has spurred the use of alternative paths that help improve the situation of platform workers. Apart from organising into collectives or through the help of unions, some platform workers have created their own delivery platforms in Madrid, namely platform cooperatives. Not only do these cooperatives compete with incumbent platforms, but notably they seek to mitigate the precarious working conditions driven by them. The researcher on unions explained:

“alternative ways of organising by riders have been cooperatives, you know, [...] whereby they have kind of tried to have the say, you know, help each other and, you know, try to make sure that all those join in the cooperative, maybe we could have a

minimum number of working hours and we could share some services” (Interview 7).

One example of such cooperatives in Madrid is La Pájara, offering food, grocery, and parcel delivery services just like Glovo or Deliveroo, yet granting its workers salaries and regular, even if initially temporary, contracts (Business Insider, 2021). Moreover, workers at La Pájara are included in decision-making processes concerning its operation, following the cooperative model used in other sectors (Bellomo et al., 2020). Although platform cooperatives are still marginal phenomena, they highlight two issues inherent to their established counterparts: one consists of the desire of some platform workers for more stable, better protected work conditions. The other issue consists of popular demand for ‘socially responsible’ platforms, in the sense of companies considering the social impact of their operations and taking care of the wellbeing of their workforces. Demand for such services might have increased due to the pandemic, which put vulnerabilities of platform workers and their essential contribution to local economies into the spotlight. Crucially, the reluctance of established, multinational platforms to stricter regulation, apart from Just Eat, leaves both issues unaddressed. Whether their reluctance can be sustainable, and what potential benefits greater regulation might promise, will be discussed in Section 7.4.

7.3.2 Platform companies’ unsuccessful attempts to influence legislation

Meanwhile, platforms have deliberately sought to engage with the Spanish government through interest groups. In the face of national pressures to regulate labour conditions in the Spanish platform economy, platforms have got involved in a country-wide interest group, Adigital, representing their views in the public sphere and the media. More recently, companies of the specific group of food delivery platforms (including Deliveroo, Glovo, and UberEats) have founded another group, APS (*Asociación de Plataformas de Servicios bajo demanda*), which mirrors Adigital’s positions on regulation (INDISA, 2021). Adigital’s main argument against greater regulation consists of the threat of a declining platform economy that would affect the platform hotspots of Madrid and Barcelona most. This, in turn, would leave customers with fewer options and lead to a decrease in job opportunities, a dramatic consequence for cities with unemployment rates in excess of 10%, in Adigital’s view (Adigital, 2020). UberEats, the delivery branch of ride-sharing company Uber, even warned that the Rider Law would spell the end of Spain’s platform economy, since platforms would no longer be profitable and be forced to cease operation in the country (Politico

Magazine, 2021), a concern shared by the regional Deputy Minister (Interview 13). Yet, as stated earlier, representatives of the municipal Employment Agency were less pessimistic and did not expect the end of delivery platforms:

“The needs are there, and I think this is not going to change because consumers have this need, and for business too, because some of them, in Madrid, we have a lot of restaurants [...] that benefits from this type of work. [...] That's why even if you regulate that activity, it doesn't disappear” (Interview 17).

Their optimism appears justified considering the emergence of local platform cooperatives which have proven the feasibility of providing services without using the classification of independent contractor.

Instead of reclassifying workers as employees, how should the ideal labour relationship between workers and platforms be structured, according to the latter? Adigital (2019) has outlined its idea of combining a rarely used Spanish category of workers, ‘TRADE’, with a ‘Social Charter’ similar to the one created by platforms in France. Essentially, TRADE would recognise platform workers as self-employed but dependent on platforms, granting them limited benefits (for example, minimum wage and annual leave). The charter, meanwhile, would list the names of all locally present platforms as well as the benefits and training opportunities these provide to potential workers. Therefore, under Adigital’s plan, workers would still not be classified as employees and thus continue to be part of the ‘outsiders’, the less protected group of temporary workers in Spain’s dualised labour market. Moreover, the use of TRADE has been criticised in one study (Cherry et al., 2017: 673) for its “burdensome and time-consuming” administrative process that would create a third category of workers, apart from permanent and part-time contracts, which practically hold the same status as independent contractors.

While platform workers have been eager to meet with public officials of Madrid’s regional government, platforms have concentrated their attention on the national level. They have thus far not engaged with the regional administration, according to the regional Deputy Minister, yet she believed that “they spoke to the [Spanish] government” (Interview 13). On the national level, relevant labour legislation is drafted and passed, hence platforms’ proposal surrounding the TRADE classification can find resonance and create impact on regulation. This corresponds to previous research (Wolf, 2022) that has found that it is a

common strategy of platforms operating in cities to deliberately seek interaction with higher governmental authorities to pre-empt regulation by municipalities. However, the Rider Law's entry into force demonstrates the failure of platforms to shape legislation and influence the political mechanisms creating it.

7.4 Discussion

The municipality's two-pronged position on platform work – unwilling to recommend it to local unemployed yet open to doing so once properly regulated – reflects an interesting management of the phenomenon. The remaining sections of this case study will discuss how the choice of not leading jobseekers towards app-based work presents a simple yet significant step that avoids conflict with non-state actors and limits the influence of platforms in governance processes. It will also be explored how openness to regulation points towards a possible future of platform work governance where interests of platforms, platform workers, and policymakers can be reconciled.

7.4.1 Power to policymakers: municipal management of constraints

Madrid's city government has little legislative leeway for responding to the precarity inherent to platform work due to a nation-wide solution which addresses concerns about working conditions comprehensively. Nonetheless, the decision of officials in the municipal Employment Agency to refuse the recommendation of app-based jobs to unemployed residents is both simple and significant. Its simplicity stems from the fact that the response does not require feedback, cooperation or consent of non-state actors while promoting the municipal aim of combatting underemployment. Compared to other cities, this is remarkable. The previous chapter revealed how the response of Milan's municipality requires the cooperation of other stakeholders to be successful. Although the Milanese city government has proposed a 'Riders Spot' as well as safety rules for platform workers, both are contingent on the agreement and financial support by the major platforms, which so far have shown little interest in backing the municipal proposals. Due to their resistance, the plans of Milan's municipality are yet to be realised. Madrid's City Hall avoids such reliance on platforms by choosing a policy that their officials can put in place autonomously. Furthermore, the unwillingness to match jobseekers with platform work does not demand

the dedication of additional municipal resources. In contrast to Milan, where the city administration holds regular roundtables with stakeholders and invests time and effort on convincing them, Madrid's municipality does not need to spare equivalent capacities. In times when city governments are expected to fulfil an increasing range of responsibilities with finite financial and administrative resources (Gupta et al., 2015), Madrid offers a scenario for an efficient response to a municipal challenge, namely underemployment.

Meanwhile, its significance stems from the power constellation which it favours. The Rider Law alleviates pressure to act from the municipality by concentrating power over the work conditions in digital labour platforms on Spain's highest governmental instance, leading non-state actors to focus their efforts on the regional and national levels. Within that context, the city government's response further limits the influence of non-state stakeholders, even if unintentionally, by not requiring their feedback or cooperation. Considering how platform companies have been shown to lobby lawmakers and policymakers to ensure the most favourable regulatory environment possible (Prassl, 2018; Wolf, 2022), Madrid demonstrates how platform companies – despite being well organised through specific interest groups, like Adigital or APS – can be constrained in their access to governance processes on several governmental levels contemporaneously. This, in turn, shifts the centre of influence over the future of app-based work to the state.

Madrid's strategy does have downsides, namely the continuation of precarious practices on platforms as long as the national law does not produce any change in platforms' business model. The municipal response's unilateral nature moreover deprives workers' representatives of a channel for voicing their views and concerns. Hence, in Madrid, it is not just platforms which experience a limitation of their power over platform work governance, but also workers themselves. This need not be the case. Since workers' everyday tasks depend on health, safety, or transport regulations that many times are set on the city level, it would make sense for the municipality to consider how these can be tailored to the needs of workers, even if the regulations are not strictly linked to workers' welfare. If the interests of platform workers are to be respected and the influence of platforms is to be limited, a more balanced approach could achieve that objective, for example by holding listening sessions or consultations with workers. The conclusion chapter (Chapter 10) will return to an investigation into possible options for city governments that seek to effectively address platform workers' precarity within institutional constraints.

7.4.2 Reconciling interests through regulation

A final aspect of the municipal position on platform work deserving attention is the Employment Agency's view of platform work as potential remedy against unemployment. Rather than being indifferent towards the platform economy as source of work opportunity for jobseekers, representatives of the agency stressed their unwillingness to incentivise the uptake of such work because it would amount to “[offering] a precarious job for people who are in a precarious way of life” (Interview 17). Yet, as noted earlier, they would be open to propose it to their “clients [...] when this will be regulated”, signalling their readiness to recommend platform work, hence following the approach of San Francisco's municipality (see Chapter 5), though only once social benefits are ensured.

That view could inform platforms' attitude towards regulation and the classification of their workers as employees, by perceiving it not as threat to their business model but rather as opportunity for further expansion. So far, most of the major platforms have opposed any stricter responsibility on their part regarding their workforces and labour relations, either through own measures or following government regulation. Just Eat represents a notable exception for classifying its delivery workers as employees and subsequently offering them employment-related social benefits, not just in Spain but also Italy (Just Eat Takeaway.com, 2020), as a researcher on unions stressed: “[Just Eat] tried to show how there is also the possibility to do the same, to provide the same service and to make the company just as profitable as platform companies while ensuring that workers are sufficiently protected by companies” (Interview 7). However, the position of Madrid's municipality should invite platforms to consider the potential positive repercussions of being subject to stricter national measures or being proactive and going further than labour law would require, like Just Eat.

The possible negative effects of regulation on platforms and platform work have been widely discussed, not least by platforms' interest groups themselves (Adigital, 2020). These mainly concern a fear of increasing unemployment, as prices for platform services might rise due to higher labour costs, thus decreasing demand for services and workers; the undermining of flexibility and autonomy of platform workers; and greater difficulty in earning additional income for workers in multiple jobs, since they might be deterred from platform work by the

regular contract. It was noted earlier how platforms have even warned of the end of the Spanish platform economy following the Rider Law (Politico Magazine, 2021).

7.4.2.1 A path towards 'normalisation' of platform companies

Yet, one should consider three arguments in favour of classifying workers as employees or granting them greater social protection through other means. First, Madrid's Employment Agency would recommend jobseekers to work on platforms and thus contribute to a steady supply of workers. As demand has grown for platform services, especially for food and grocery delivery since the start of the pandemic (Uber Technologies Inc., 2020; Glovo, 2020), platforms will have an interest in ensuring that increased demand of customers is met by increased supply of workers, and municipal offices could help them do so.

Second, platforms could benefit from training opportunities for their workers provided by the city government. Members of the Employment Agency (Interview 17) signalled the agency's willingness to help jobseekers navigate the platform economy and equip them with the necessary knowledge to manage administrative burdens, such as how to pay their taxes or fulfil health and safety standards, particularly in food delivery. There could even be the potential for expanding the scope of training offered by the municipality, according to representatives of the agency, for example by teaching individuals how to adapt the platform model for their own business ideas (though platform companies might regard such municipal support as promotion of unwanted competition). Access to a pool of well-trained workers should be in platforms' interest, considering that workers are the public faces of these companies and can influence customers' perception of platforms.

Third, and in relation to the previous point, greater protection of workers could improve the image of platforms in the public discourse. Since the success of platforms depends on demand for their services, platforms should have an interest in avoiding repeated media reports about precarious working conditions, court cases, and workers' protests. Moreover, platform cooperatives have shown that appetite for gig services with better working conditions does exist among customers in Madrid, and established platforms could seize on that trend. In addition, Just Eat serves as example that large-scale, multinational platforms

can successfully operate even when workers are granted employment-related protections. Cherry et al. (2017) found supporting evidence that some platforms, departing from the widespread independent contractor model, have indeed fared as well as ‘regular’ ones.

From Mokyr et al.’s (2015) standpoint, greater social protections of platform workers would lead to a ‘normalisation’ of platforms, as opposed to ‘reinforcement’ (when platforms would continue their practices). In other words, these companies would shift from their predominant business model, relying on large groups of independent contractors, towards a standard labour relationship of employer and employee and, in one sense, become ‘normal’ companies. For example, ride-sharing platforms would come to assimilate taxi providers in terms of workers’ entitlements to protections, while food delivery gig companies would mirror the employment model of supermarkets’ delivery services. Although the accuracy of the term ‘normal’ can certainly be disputed since indefinite employment contracts need not be the norm (other terms, such as ‘assimilation’, could describe Mokyr et al.’s thesis more precisely), it points towards a possible future for platform urbanism. In such scenario, platforms would no longer be accused of promoting “bogus self-employment” (Palier, 2019: 125) but compete with other companies for workers on a level playing field in terms of labour costs and entitlement to social benefits. Previous studies on the platform economy and platform work (Weber, 2017; Eichhorst et al., 2017) have expressed their preference for this ‘normalisation’ due to its potential to combine the best of two worlds: allowing the promotion of innovative, digital practices of business and consumption, while ensuring the rights of workers in the growing digitally enabled economy. In other words, such optimistic scenario could see the reconciliation of interests of platforms, platform workers, policymakers, and consumers. If platforms accepted greater regulation, consumers would continue to be able to enjoy their services, while platform workers could access social benefits and policymakers would gain more influence over how platforms affect urban life and labour markets. Whether platforms, and the venture capitalists financing their operations, are ready to cede control over how they treat and classify their workers remains doubtful, however.

7.5 Conclusion

In all, the policy outcome – the unwillingness of Madrid’s city government to recommend platform work while unregulated – cannot be explained by any single indicator of multi-level governance but only through a consideration of all four indicators in tandem. While Spain’s Rider Law influences positions and roles of other governmental authorities as well as non-state actors, concerns among city officials about leading jobseekers into precarious work and the self-perception as pilot city for the law produce this specific municipal response. In the context of constrained competences and focus on other local challenges, the decision not to recommend app-based work constitutes a simple yet significant step. It furthers the municipality’s goal of combatting widespread underemployment without the need to cooperate with other stakeholders or earn their consent, even if the response does not necessarily address insecure work conditions of platform work per se. Madrid’s case study is particularly insightful considering the power constellation it reflects, with state and municipal governments able to respond to the precarious conditions of platform workers by limiting the influence of platforms and respective interest groups in governance processes.

The three cases of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco, and the different responses they pursue in managing platform work, have raised several questions: about the scope of municipalities in improving the conditions of platform workers, the role of platform work in achieving other municipal objectives, and the prospects of resolving the social tensions inherent to platform urbanism on municipal level. Their comparison therefore promises insights for drafting recommendations for other city governments which the discussion (Chapter 9) will address. First, though, Chapter 8 will draw on the MLG framework to analyse in what ways the Covid-19 pandemic altered or reinforced municipal responses to app-based work in all three cities.

8. The Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on platform work governance

During most of 2020 and early 2021, the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic acted as magnifying glass on platform work in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco. It did so not just due to the growth of the phenomenon per se, but also because the presence of delivery riders in luminous jackets on otherwise deserted streets and squares increased their visibility. Platform workers became seen as important actors in the maintenance of essential services in times of lockdowns (Benner et al., 2020: 1), yet they also carried the burden of increased health risks, such as a potential Covid-19 infection. Interestingly, despite heightened awareness for the precarious conditions of platform workers, the three municipalities did not change their responses to platform work. In fact, empirical data reveal a reinforcement or reproduction of previous responses. It is the purpose of the present chapter to investigate why that was the case.

The chapter will analyse the pandemic's effects on each city government's response to platform work in four steps. Section 8.1 will demonstrate the value of multi-level governance (MLG) for accounting for those effects by introducing theories on policy (dis)continuity and comparing them to MLG. It will draw parallels between their emphases on institutional structures and the role of agency on one hand, and the four MLG indicators on the other, arguing that MLG offers a comprehensive framework for explaining the continuity of municipal responses during the pandemic. The second section will engage with empirical data from the three cases to outline the pandemic's impacts on platform work in those cities, stressing both the important role of platform workers as well as their exacerbated vulnerabilities due to increased health risks. Against the backdrop provided by the second section, Section 8.3 will discuss each case study in turn and show how MLG explains the reinforcement of municipal responses to app-based work. It will underline how the particular circumstances brought to the fore pre-existing attitudes towards the phenomenon and put other policy issues at the top of municipal agendas. The final Section 8.4 will consider to what extent the pandemic contributed to a 'platformisation' of urban economies, evaluate the pitfalls of workers' increased visibility during that period, and ponder the municipal governance of platform work during crises with references to the theoretical considerations on policy (dis)continuity.

Most significantly, a key finding is that the continuity of municipalities' responses to platform work was not due to the absence of change in the three MLG arrangements. Instead, the stability of each city government's response resulted from particular changes revealed by the indicators. San Francisco's case reflected increased preoccupation about poverty and homelessness as well as a recognition of platform workers as essential to local residents and businesses in times of lockdown. Meanwhile, Milan's municipality pursued its two-pronged approach of business support and defending workers' rights. The city government in Madrid, whose officials previously assigned little urgency to platform work, further deprioritised the phenomenon against the backdrop of rising unemployment. Temporary support mechanisms for self-employed workers provided by higher governmental levels in all three cities might have contributed to the absence of more significant municipal actions in protection of workers' rights, even if platform workers mostly missed out on these. Overall, although the Covid-19 pandemic can be seen to have favoured the 'platformisation' of cities – or the entrenchment of platform services and platform work – heightened awareness for app-based workers' vulnerabilities could yet result in greater public intervention in the platform economy.

8.1 Theoretical accounts of policy (dis)continuity

The recent Covid-19 pandemic shed light on the tensions inherent to platform urbanism between innovative digitalisation and vulnerable workers in dense urban spaces. Cities were hit hard by the virus due to their population density, particularly in case of overcrowded housing, and their connectivity to the rest of world, facilitating the spread of viruses (Florida et al., 2021). Meanwhile, as workers continued to engage in platform work and exposed themselves to a potential coronavirus infection, it became increasingly clear that the working conditions of platforms were unsustainable, and that existing regulation was insufficient. Therefore, one might expect that the pandemic-driven trend towards urban platform use and work, discussed in Section 8.2, provoked some change in municipal policies on platform urbanism, particularly if awareness for workers' vulnerabilities was heightened during the unique circumstances. In fact, the three preceding case studies revealed limited support mechanisms for platform workers, leaving leeway for more comprehensive responses that address workers' precarious conditions. The pandemic could have offered a catalyst for making use of that leeway, presenting a "game changer" (Avelino et al., 2014: 5) for policy

on platform work. However, public emergencies do not necessarily lead to changes in policy responses or institutional processes. As the following paragraphs will show, agency and structure have been found by earlier theoretical studies to determine the continuity or change of policies. Importantly, MLG as operationalised in Chapter 3 can help account for either reproduction or “discontinuity” (Thelen, 2009: 475) of the three municipal responses by alerting to the roles of non-state actors, governmental hierarchies, and municipal priorities during the pandemic.

8.1.1 Agency and structure as determinants of (dis)continuity

Policy changes, as well as the impact of crises on policy, have been explained through diverse theories, and the roles of structure and agency lie at the heart of those theoretical accounts. First, proponents of path dependency have argued that the timing of a crisis determines its impact on policy. Path dependent policy change is bounded by formal and informal institutional constraints (Pierson, 2000) and the scale of impact of a crisis has been said to depend on how well developed formal institutions, referring to laws, regulations or established governmental structures (DiGaetano et al., 2003), are. For example, a health crisis such as the pandemic is less likely to alter social policy in a country where the welfare state, or the institutionalised provision of social services in cases of ill health or unemployment, is already comprehensive (Castles, 2010: 96). Studies adopting path dependency approaches thus emphasise and investigate the stability of institutional structures. Yet, such focus does not imply institutional “stickiness” or inertia (Thelen, 2009: 474) over time. Research on policy change in US cities, for instance, has found that change tends to take place incrementally, due to financial constraints and the trend towards “governing by precedent” (Crecine, 1969: n.p.). Studying national policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, Capano et al. (2020) came to a similar result: national governments responded to the economic and social effects of the pandemic by relying on existing decision-making mechanisms and channels. The emergency mobilised existing processes instead of creating new ones, also due to a lack of preparation. Nonetheless, incremental changes can result in larger institutional transformation cumulatively and over time (Thelen, 2009: 477).

However, institutional change need not solely be incremental (Van der Heijden et al., 2017). Policy trajectories can be punctuated with “major departures from the status quo” (Sapotichne et al., 2013: n.p.) when a threshold is reached that requires policymakers to “make up for past inattention”, for instance when existing policies are found to be ineffective. Such threshold could also be reached when “game changers” – “macro-phenomena (events and trends) that are perceived to change (the rules, fields and players in the) the ‘game’ of societal interaction” (Avelino et al., 2014: 5) – put into question established institutions, be they formal or informal. As Deverell (2010: 32) has written, crises can challenge “behavior, structures and cultures” within institutions. According to Katznelson (2003: 1), such “critical junctures” increase the role of agency and choice in policy processes, even if Thelen (2009: 493) added that agency matters “*all the time*” and one needs to pay attention to actors’ behaviour within specific institutions to explain (dis)continuity. Similarly, Boin et al. (2005) have highlighted the role of leaders in setting the course of action in a crisis, deciding what a crisis’ main impacts are as well as which responses these require. Boin et al.’s (ibid.) argument supports the importance of framing for explaining how a crisis is perceived by actors in policy processes and which steps should be taken in response. According to Avelino et al. (2014), perception and interpretation of a crisis indeed are fundamental determinants of whether an event evokes the need for institutional change. Mahoney et al. (2010: n.p.) have equally stressed the influence of actors on policy change, but they have refined the theory by asking if “defenders of the status quo” are afforded “veto possibilities”, stressing the conflict potential between different groups of actors.

These theories of policy change, though emphasising either agency or structure, are not mutually exclusive. In fact, one should expect that policymakers’ views of a crisis are in part determined by institutions (Evenhuis, 2017), both informal ones including norms and beliefs as well as formal ones that refer to the policy tools by which a crisis can be tackled, as Thelen’s insight above indicated. Consequently, earlier theories suggest that the roles of both actors as well as institutional contexts should be taken into account when analysing the development of policy and its continuity or change in times of crisis.

8.1.2 Multi-level governance as account of (dis)continuity

Here, the value of multi-level governance (MLG) and of its operationalisation through four indicators becomes visible. The earlier discussion of the conceptual literature (Chapter 3) proposed the following indicators: 1. roles, views, and involvement of non-state actors; 2. relationship between governmental levels regarding platform work; 3. availability of competences and instruments on municipal level; and 4. involvement of the municipality in the policy debate on platform work. Thus, the framework combines aspects of abovementioned theories and alerts to the interplay of institutional structures and agency. On one hand, MLG sheds light on the shape and nature of interaction between different governmental levels regarding a policy issue such as platform work. Through indicators 2 and 3, it considers whether that relationship is strictly hierarchical, what role the city government plays within the hierarchy, and how relevant competences are distributed. This could be a crucial factor for explaining responses during the pandemic, for instance when a regional or national government decided to put in place support mechanisms for self-employed workers or independent contractors, including app-based workers, therefore taking pressure to act off city governments.

On the other hand, MLG points to the roles of municipal officials within the respective governmental hierarchies as well as of non-state actors. The perception of platform work by officials, emphasised by indicator 4, already emerged as important determinant of responses to the phenomenon in the preceding case studies (Chapters 5-7). Studies by Boin et al. (2005) and Avelino et al. (2014) have underlined the significance of perception in how policymakers respond to crises, as shown above. Yet, indicator 1 stresses the objectives of non-state actors and their influence on policy processes, underlining the need for an appreciation of a wider variety of stakeholders than municipal officials. As Mahoney et al.'s (2010) article has argued, a crisis can lead to conflict between various interest groups and state and non-state actors, with possible consequences for policy outcomes. In the present project, such conflict could have emerged between platform workers demanding protection from increased health risks and city governments eager to allow the continuation of platform services during the pandemic. This insight makes an investigation of the relationship between actors in municipal platform work governance worthwhile, and MLG has been proven to be suitable for such purposes in the case studies.

Moreover, the three case studies already demonstrated not only MLG's usefulness in alerting to important influences on municipal policies but also how the various indicators interrelate

and influence each other: for example, how non-state actors adjust their strategies depending on the openness of municipalities to listen to them, or how the perceived urgency of app-based work by city officials can be influenced by the presence or absence of actions taken by higher governmental levels. Therefore, the interplay of different indicators should also be at the centre of analysis when investigating the reasons for the respective municipal responses to platform work during the Covid-19 pandemic. After providing an overview over the pandemic's effects on the platform sectors in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco in Section 8.2, the third section will analyse the respective municipal responses to platform work during that specific period through an MLG framework to explain the continuity or change of previous responses.

8.2 Platform work during the pandemic: evidence from Madrid, Milan and San Francisco

Drawing on empirical data from semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, and complementing them with insights from existing literature, this section will argue that the pandemic highlighted and reinforced the importance of platform work in the three cities while exacerbating the vulnerabilities of app-based workers. It will sketch the pandemic's effects on the local labour markets and the challenges which faced the respective city governments during that period. These insights will then form the context for the analysis of city governments' responses to platform work in Section 8.3.

8.2.1 Increased importance of platform services

The literature review (Chapter 2) demonstrated how high population density of urban areas constitutes one significant component for the success of the platform economy. It is the same density, however, which made cities particularly prone to high rates of coronavirus infections and mortality (Salama, 2020). The health of urban residents hence demanded drastic action in the three cities. Lockdowns, the response of policymakers to the human transmission of Covid-19, changed the ways people carried out essential in-person activities and produced consequences for the nature and extent of platform work. While Milan was the first of the three cities to close all non-essential in-person facilities from mid-March to early May 2020 (OML, 2021: 63) and faced different levels of restrictions on public life for

the rest of the year, Madrid and San Francisco responded to rising infection rates in similar fashion.

San Francisco took the deliberate choice to go further than California's state-wide restrictions, even if it meant risking damage to a healthy local economy with its low unemployment rate, as the city's Chief Economist explained: "San Francisco basically was as restrictive as possible. The city kind of explicitly said we want as few Covid deaths as possible and we don't care what happens to our economy" (Interview 9). Since the first lockdown in early 2020, the city underwent several waves of restrictions, such as in December 2020 when the city government decided to issue another stay-at-home order (City and County of San Francisco, 2020). Only in early June 2021, it seemed that most limitations, including physical distancing, would be lifted permanently (City and County of San Francisco, 2021). In Madrid's case, too, the local economy experienced repeated lockdown stages starting in March 2020 throughout the year, several times put in place either by the Spanish government or the regional government (BBC News, 2020), with implications for businesses, consumers, and workers.

Consequently, residents were unable to leave their homes and restaurants were forced to shut during the most restrictive periods. Platforms offered one significant way of alleviating the impact of restrictions for both residents and business owners, especially those platforms specialised on food and grocery delivery, such as Glovo and Just Eat in Madrid and Milan, and Deliveroo and InstaCart in San Francisco. Their service became an alternative for urban consumers because platform workers continued to operate despite the restrictions in place, as reports by platforms indicate. Although the closure of most restaurants limited the range of available options on platforms, grocery delivery became an important business branch for platform companies. In a letter to shareholders from July 2020, the CEO of Glovo, one of the largest delivery platforms in Europe, noted that, "sales of grocery products climbed from 6% to 18% of our total orders" (Glovo, 2020: n.p.). A rival delivery platform, Just Eat, equally underlined record numbers in customers and orders in both Italy and Spain, where Milan and Madrid are among the largest markets, in its 2020 annual report (Just Eat Takeaway.com, 2021: 25). Data gathered by the Prefecture of Milan and cited by a representative of local platform workers (Interview 16) support the conclusion that the period of lockdown resulted in a sudden spike in demand: the use of digital platforms during the pandemic increased by around 56%, and the Prefecture "mapped around 66,000 workers

in the food delivery section, so being more than double the number” (Interview 16) compared to the pre-pandemic period.

Not only did some incumbent platforms benefit from curfews and closures, but new ones seized the opportunity to gain ground in the urban platform economy. In Milan, for example, the difficulty of leaving one’s home and the risk of a potential infection led to a surge in the use of so-called shoppers distinct from the grocery service of the more established platforms mentioned above, as an Italian researcher on the digitalisation of work observed:

“[...] at the moment there is a rise in the number of shoppers. Shoppers is the definition of those workers that basically go shopping for you to a retail store to buy food, groceries and so on and so forth, because let's say trained by these periods of the lockdown, many consumers are using the platforms of large retailers from Carrefour to Esselunga [...] they are basically delivering something as much as riders” (Interview 1).

The rise of shoppers reflects the growing diversity of app-based work fuelled by the pandemic. On one hand, the “online-to-offline” platform model described in the literature review is no longer exclusive to multinational platform companies like Uber or Glovo but has also been adopted by more local businesses, for example Esselunga in Milan. On the other, shoppers also highlight the variety of employment conditions app-based workers can face. While multinational platforms rely on the self-employed status of their workers, including shoppers of InstaCart, but with the notable exception of Just Eat which employs its platform workers, shoppers of supermarket chains are usually employed – pointing to the need for awareness of the diverse risks and needs of different groups of platform workers. At the same time, Milan’s platform economy also witnessed the growth of previously smaller, lesser-known companies, for instance WashOut offering carwash services, a local worker representative emphasised (Interview 16). WashOut’s growth highlighted that it was not only rising customer demand which favoured the fortunes of platforms during lockdown periods, but so did increased interest of individuals in working for them, leading to a rise in the supply of platform workers. This is an important factor Section 8.2.2 will examine in detail.

Hence, in urban economies, the combination of strong platform demand and new platforms seeking to profit from that trend accelerated the “platformisation [...] that has become even

more intense with the pandemic”, to use the words of a Spanish academic researching precarity in Spain’s labour market, commenting on the platform economy in Madrid (Interview 7). In his view, that development also led many smaller businesses to realise the advantages of adopting the concept of platform as principal business model: being less dependent on physical shops for sale or service provision, using established platforms to market their products, relying on fewer employees, and outsourcing delivery to independent contractors. In times of physical distancing and stay-at-home orders, such a model proved advantageous.

In all, when eating out became impossible and grocery shopping risked human transmission of Covid-19, platforms offered an increasingly popular channel of substitution for common in-person activities. Evidently, the health risks emanating from the pandemic did not disappear through the use of platforms. Instead, they merely got shifted from customers to platform workers, as Section 8.2.3 will discuss. Yet, for the business of platforms, the restrictions imposed by cities seemed beneficial. At this point, it should be noted that the repercussions of locked-down urban economies did not favour all platforms equally. US company Uber expressed the highly unequal impact on platforms in quantitative terms most clearly. In the second quarter of 2020, when restrictions were at their toughest, bookings for Uber rides dropped by roughly three thirds compared to the previous year. At the same time, demand for the company’s delivery branch UberEats skyrocketed by 106% (Uber Technologies Inc., 2020). On the aggregate, however, a case can be made for the increased presence of platforms in the three cities due to the pandemic, filling a void in consumer demand and supplying residents with goods and groceries.

8.2.2 Influx of workers into platform work

Lockdowns and the consequent economic downturn had severe effects on the local labour markets, though more pronounced in Madrid and San Francisco than in Milan due to a de facto dismissal ban in Italy (Table 13). These challenging employment conditions contributed to a rise in available labour for platforms at a crucial moment for their businesses, even in Milan. In order to meet increased demand for their services, as demonstrated earlier, it can be expected that they have been eager to attract many of those looking for jobs or additional income. Despite the absence of quantitative data on the exact number of

unemployed workers transitioning from retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors to platforms, as the head of Milan’s Labour Market Observatory OML explained (Interview 14), a representative of the local platform workers association (Interview 16) recognised a connection between periods of lockdown and increasing numbers of workers on platforms driven by the need to make a living. As cited earlier, Milan’s Prefecture counted around 66,000 platform delivery workers during the later stages of the pandemic, more than double compared to pre-2020. According to the interview participant, this trend was not exclusive to food delivery but also affected other platforms in Milan such as car cleaning apps, “while before it was difficult to walk around in the street and find one of them, now you can easily find a lot of them during like every day” (Interview 16). In the words of a local Municipal Councillor, “the number of cyclo-delivery workers grew exponentially” (Interview 12). These local trends towards the platformisation of service sectors also reflect findings elsewhere (McKinsey Global Institute, 2020) that the pandemic accelerated the digitalisation of work and the significance of the platform economy in Europe.

Table 13: Unemployment rates in the three cities before and during lockdown periods.

Case	Pre-lockdown level	Lockdown level
San Francisco	2.4% (December 2019)	12.1% (June 2020)
Milan	5.9% (2019)	5.7% (2020)
Madrid	10.0% (December 2019)	12.6% (June 2020)

Data sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Datosmacro, ISTAT. More granular data, such as monthly or quarterly rates, were unavailable for Milan at the time of writing.

The attractiveness of platforms for jobseekers could be explained by a couple of factors. First, hiring in traditional sectors and the large service economy involving in-person interaction came to a standstill, apart from essential shops, leaving unemployed individuals with few alternatives. Some supermarket chains, for instance, did increase recruitment to cope with the exceptional circumstances (Forbes, 2020) while many employees in Madrid and Milan benefitted from furlough schemes, as Section 8.3 will highlight. Yet, many freelancers or workers on short-term or intermittent contracts missed out on the opportunity of furlough. Second, the flexible working conditions of platforms, though often criticised for promoting precarity (Taylor et al., 2017), might have been appealing for those seeking to bridge a period of intermittency between two jobs and provide some earnings. This explanation would correspond to the view of Nidil’s representative in Milan that many people turned to platform work for an easily accessible source of income rather than for full-

time employment that would bind them for a longer period. The interview participant stated that “during the pandemic, they registered a lot of people that [...] were in extreme need of a quick and easy, even if it's not that easy money” (Interview 16). Platforms thus presented not only an alternative to restaurants and shops for urban customers, but, evidence from the three cases suggests, also for urban workers. The former group found a substitute for fulfilling their consumer preferences, while the latter found a substitute for other work opportunities.

8.2.3 Additional vulnerabilities of platform workers

Section 8.3 will underline the recognition of app-based workers as essential. However, as one defining feature of “essentialness” consisted of carrying out physical, in-person tasks, these workers were more likely to be affected by human transmission of Covid-19. An analysis (Benner et al., 2020) of the nature of platform work during the pandemic in San Francisco, conducted by a team of researchers led by Chris Benner during the first lockdown in spring 2020, showed how these essential workers suddenly experienced additional vulnerabilities. Importantly, the study found that many platform workers, including ride-hailing drivers and food-delivery riders, had no other choice but to continue their activity in spite of the emerging health risks emanating from a potential infection precisely because of their pre-existing precarity.

Above all, the researchers noted pre-existing financial vulnerabilities, or workers that had struggled to make a living prior to the pandemic (Benner et al., 2020: 1). Lockdowns exacerbated the situation when the closure of shops, restaurants and small businesses interrupted streams of income for workers who were unable to adapt through telework. Yet, despite rising demand for platform services, “76% had seen a significant reduction in jobs being offered” by the respective platforms (ibid.: 3), which could be an indication for either a substantial influx of workers, or a highly unbalanced impact of demand for different platforms, favouring delivery over ride-hailing workers. Furthermore, San Francisco’s platform workers were particularly exposed to the circulating virus, often because of lacking provision of basic personal protective equipment (PPE) by public authorities or platforms (ibid.: 3). Therefore, the pandemic put the city’s platform workers into a position of increased vulnerability. A similar situation could be observed in Milan, where the city

government and platforms disagreed over who should provide PPE for workers; the Municipal Councillor moreover emphasised app-based workers' exacerbated risks at the time: "platform companies struggled to distribute individual safety devices such as gloves and masks, with a serious risk to the health of workers and citizens" (Interview 12). To sum up, the circumstances of Covid-19 contributed to a growth of the local platform economies while putting the health of app-based workers at risk. Questions of if, and how, the growing presence of platforms affected the respective municipal responses to platform work will be addressed in the following.

8.3 Municipal responses to platform work during Covid-19

This section will analyse how the unique demands and circumstances of the pandemic affected city governments' responses to platform work in San Francisco, Milan, and Madrid. Crucially, what emerges in all three case studies is the continuity of previous municipal responses. Awareness for the precarious work conditions of platform workers was heightened in all three cases, often resulting in workers' formal or informal recognition as "essential" by municipal officials or departments. Still, municipalities either deprioritised concerns related to platform work, as in Madrid's and San Francisco's case, or favoured its continuation for the sake of the local economy in Milan. Seen through an MLG lens, such continuity results not because the MLG arrangements did not reflect any changes during the pandemic, but because of how they changed.

8.3.1 San Francisco: "a gig is better [...] than nothing right now"

San Francisco's city government did not alter its earlier approach towards platform work, as detailed in Chapter 5. Instead, it embraced app-based work for local jobseekers, motivated by the social and economic developments of the period. Due to lockdowns necessitated by the pandemic, a dramatic situation emerged in San Francisco's labour market which, despite the prominence of its tech industries, relies on large tourism and hospitality sectors. The unemployment rate reached around 12% in June 2020 (Table 13), markedly higher than the pre-pandemic rate of 2-3% and affecting large proportions of the urban population (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Speaking during the later stages of the pandemic in 2021, a representative of San Francisco's Office for Economic and Workforce Development

(OEWD) remarked, “[O]ur hospitality sector has been wiped out [...] those are small businesses and that provides income for such a high percentage of residents of San Francisco” (Interview 10). It should be noted that unemployment affected not only low-skilled service sectors, or those that require fewer qualifications. In fact, high-skilled workers in tech faced tougher competition on the local labour market, too. Although “the tech industry was not impacted nearly [...] as badly as most other sectors”, according to OEWD’s representative (Interview 10), those laid off during the pandemic joined a growing competitive pool of jobseekers. As a result, “the folks that were already at the back of the line in terms of getting tech jobs are still in the back of the line but the line just got a lot longer” (Interview 10).

In part, San Francisco’s City Hall followed the approaches of Madrid and Milan outlined in later paragraphs, aiming to “retool” (Interview 10) unemployed individuals from small businesses so that they may apply to jobs requiring more technical qualifications following the pandemic. However, and most significantly for platform companies, the rise in unemployment reinforced the municipality’s position to recognise platform work as positive outcome. In the earlier case study (Chapter 5), the city government’s policy shift towards acknowledging that type of work was already stressed. During the pandemic, discussions about the precarious nature of platform work got “deprioritised because homelessness has been exacerbated” and platform work further embraced, as OEWD’s member pointed out (Interview 10). Even though rent prices dropped by more than a fourth due to an exodus of people from the city, the fall was not enough to compensate for the loss of many residents’ income, or “to make San Francisco an affordable place for anything other than tech”, the city’s Chief Economist noted (Interview 9). The combination of rising unemployment and unaffordable living costs hence favoured and legitimised the flow of jobseekers into platform work: “There are a lot of people that just have no income. Right. So effectively, a gig is better [...] than nothing right now”, in the words of OEWD’s official (Interview 10). Thus, platforms were considered a quick source of income to bridge intermittent spells in times of decreased hiring. The OEWD employee could imagine that his department’s position, and that of the mayor’s office to which it is linked, might change, “if we go back to full employment. But right now, I think it’s important that we see [...] any win as a win” (Interview 10).

Arguably, this approach might not have just been a “win” for unemployed residents but also for platforms themselves. The municipality’s stance further supported platforms’ argument that they make a valuable contribution to local economies, despite calls by their opponents who point out the diverse downsides for workers. Indeed, one municipal department, the Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE, 2020b: 2), did recognise the contributions of platforms and platform workers during the pandemic in the Employee Protections Ordinance, which was passed in May 2020 and obliges employers to provide health protections or PPE to workers:

“on-demand delivery services [...] provide critical access to essential items during the Public Health Emergency. Many San Franciscans, especially residents who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 due to age or underlying health conditions, have turned to on-demand delivery services to receive food and other essential items while staying safe at home. [...] on-demand delivery drivers and shoppers are an *essential population of workers*” [emphasis added].

Still, the case of San Francisco demonstrates that a perception of being essential did not produce fundamental practical impacts on the working conditions of platform workers. While San Francisco’s OLSE also administered the introduction of two months’ additional pay to other essential workers, platform workers missed out on that bonus. As the city’s Chief Economist explained, beneficiaries mainly included “grocery store workers and drug store workers” (Interview 9). This could reflect a further downside of what is often called the misclassification of platform workers as independent contractors. Since OLSE has competence and oversight over the employees of companies, self-employed individuals including platform workers do not fall within its purview. OLSE defined the term employee in the Employee Protections Ordinance of 2020 as “any person who in a particular week performs at least two hours of work for a Covered Employer within the geographical boundaries of the City” (OLSE, 2020b: 4), and covered employer as entity which “exercises control over the wages, hours, or working conditions of an Employee”. However, these definitions contrast with platforms’ self-perception as technology companies and perception of their workers as self-employed individuals who control their own working hours (Brail, 2018). Thus, it is unsurprising that Benner et al. (2020) reported both the lack of PPE provision by platforms in the Californian city, as well as the absence of OLSE’s support for many app-based workers classified as independent contractors.

National initiatives instituted during the pandemic did not provide additional support to all platform workers either: so-called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) for independent contractors, including app-based workers, was only available to US citizens who could prove significant income loss due to the pandemic (Table 14). Yet, as Benner et al. (2020) found, 56% of local platform workers do not possess citizenship. Nonetheless, PUA's existence, alongside OLSE's provisions and the discussions surrounding Assembly Bill 5 at the time, might have led City Hall to consider the vulnerabilities of app-based workers as addressed, therefore reducing the urgency to intervene in the platform economy.

Table 14: Principal support mechanisms of regional or national authorities for self-employed workers, independent contractors (i.e. platform workers) or intermittent workers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Case	Support mechanisms	Shortcomings
San Francisco	Federal PUA (<i>Pandemic Unemployment Assistance</i>) for self-employed and independent contractors from February 2020	Only US citizens are eligible; requires proof of significant service reduction due to pandemic
Milan	National Covid-19 indemnity of €600 per month for intermittent workers (<i>Decreto Cura Italia, Decreto Rilancio</i>) from March 2020	Requires proof of employment contracts from 2019; does not cover independent contractors
Madrid	Support of max. €3200 for self-employed workers/SMEs without employees by Madrid Region	Category of T.R.A.D.E. workers (including independent contractors) not eligible

Data sources: KPMG, INPS, Employment Development Department California.

Overall, MLG points to two crucial determinants of the municipality's response to app-based work during the pandemic and officials' embrace of such work for local jobseekers. The first consists of officials' perception of platform work as remedy against skyrocketing unemployment and persistent levels of homelessness. Municipal policymakers were aware that lockdowns would have detrimental effects for urban workers, as the earlier quote by the city's Chief Economist in Section 8.2.1 indicated, and considered app-based work "better [...] than nothing" (Interview 10). Second, federal PUA and California's AB 5 targeted the precarious conditions of app-based workers and other independent contractors, even if not comprehensively or satisfactorily, and hence took pressure to act off City Hall.

8.3.2 Milan: platforms “indispensable for the supply of Milanese citizens”

The pandemic brought to the fore the two-pronged approach of Milan’s municipality to app-based work outlined earlier (Chapter 6). In fact, the emergency situation did not alter the municipal response to platform work. As MLG helps to unveil, workers’ representatives pushed for the protection of workers, yet the constraints of municipal competences and the recognition of platform workers as essential to the city resulted in limited support for app-based workers during the pandemic. Milan’s city government was faced with a challenging economic outlook, though not reflected in the official unemployment statistics. According to data from Italy’s statistics agency ISTAT (Table 13), unemployment in Milan even decreased slightly during 2020 compared to 2019, aided by a country-wide dismissal ban (Allen & Overy, 2020). Yet, these numbers masked the complete standstill of new employment contracts, especially of short duration which did not get renewed, across the city’s labour market as well as the rise in economically inactive residents who gave up jobhunting and were not registered as unemployed (OML, 2021: 9).

Therefore, despite steady unemployment levels, workers on short-term contracts felt the pandemic’s economic costs: the significance of Milan’s events, arts and cultural sectors as well as the growing tourism sector made the local workforce prone to the consequences of lockdowns. In the words of the head of Milan’s Labour Market Observatory OML, “In 2019, we had a big increase in labour market and economy in Milan. Of course, 2020 was dramatic” (Interview 14). The cancellation of the city’s famous expositions for fashion and design put pressure on a large group of workers with irregular, part-time working patterns that usually form the backbone of their organisation, affecting “all the chain of services behind the scene”, as OML’s head explained: “[During] the pandemic here, the close down was for them a real close down. There was no coming back to work”. In the city’s financial district, the closure of offices and entire business skyscrapers affected those cleaning or working in the canteens while those previously using the office were able to continue their jobs from home, he further reported. “[T]here are skyscrapers of 40 or 60 floors [...] No more cleaning of the upper floors because they are just left empty” (Interview 14). Additionally, freelancers with project-based contracts, for example in creative professions or consultancy, reflected the diversity of professions affected by the hiring freeze, as an Italian researcher on precarious work stressed during the interview, “there are a lot of

freelancers working in sectors directly affected by the pandemic. And of course, when there is a crisis, freelancers are the first that are pushed away” (Interview 11).

Similar to Madrid, Milan’s officials reflected preoccupations in terms of low-skilled unemployment and long-term challenges, as the head of OML indicated: “Do we have some sector where to ship those workers? I suspect that we do not have such escape way” (Interview 14). Even though he expressed confidence that the first of Milan’s traditional expositions might restart during the autumn of 2021 and would help alleviate part of the pressure in the urban economy, he did expect some permanent changes brought about by the pandemic that could inflict structural damage on the city’s workforce and employment situation. For example, the shift towards remote work and fall in the number of high-qualified workers present in the city could result in a long-term decrease in demand for various service sectors, and while “[it] is not going to happen tomorrow [...] the day after tomorrow, this might be a real issue” (Interview 14).

Regarding the municipal response to app-based work during the pandemic, the City Councillor responsible for Employment, Commerce and Human Resources herself praised platforms’ contribution to the urban economy hit by lockdowns. In her view, they became “indispensable for the supply of Milanese citizens and for the survival of the H.O.R.E.C.A. economic sector” (Interview 12). H.O.R.E.C.A. traditionally refers to hotels, restaurants, and catering, but in this context, it was the latter two that benefitted most from the possibility of connecting Milan’s residents isolating at home and restaurants looking for customers via platforms. Notably, however, the city’s recognition of platform workers during the pandemic focused on delivery riders, leaving other larger groups aside. This can be seen as result both of the particular sector riders engage in – increasingly demanded during times of lockdown – as well as of their visibility in urban spaces. Riders are also represented in the regular municipal roundtable discussed in Milan’s detailed case study (Chapter 6). The repercussions of greater visibility of delivery riders for the perception and representation of other app-based workers will be analysed in Section 8.4.

Yet, despite the recognition of platform workers’ contribution during the pandemic, initiatives to protect workers from increased health risks faced difficulties. Efforts by Milan’s municipality to put in place tighter safety standards for platform workers confirm

that the vulnerabilities described by Benner et al. (2020) in San Francisco were also present in the Italian city and noted by the city government. According to the Councillor, action was urgently required because, “platform companies struggled to distribute individual safety devices [...], with a serious risk to the health of workers and citizens” (Interview 12). In March 2020, within the framework of the monthly roundtable with representatives of platform workers, the Councillor proposed “Ten Rules of Safety” for delivery riders, as Nidil’s representative reported. These rules were supposed to apply to platform companies on a voluntary basis and provide “masks and gloves [...], the possibility to use bathrooms, to clean the backpacks”, to workers, giving them some means of protection against a potential infection, according to Nidil’s member (Interview 16). However, when the companies were called to participate in the respective roundtable, “they were really blocked by AssoDelivery” (Interview 16), the association which represents platforms in Italy: the companies and their interest group refused to comply with the safety rules. In lieu of the Ten Rules of Safety, volunteers of the municipality managed to distribute 1,000 safety kits containing masks and gloves to riders, the Councillor emphasised (Interview 12). Considering that the Prefecture of Milan estimated the number of workers in food-delivery platforms alone to be around 66,000 during the first lockdown, as mentioned earlier, the city-run distribution of kits only marginally alleviated the increased health risk. Arguably, one can draw two conclusions from Milan’s experience. First, despite the city’s acknowledgment of platforms’ contribution to the local economy during the pandemic as “indispensable”, it recognised the heightened vulnerabilities of workers. Second, the failure to implement the Ten Rules of Safety serves as example of municipalities’ limited influence over the conduct of platforms concerning workers’ welfare.

The lack of greater action against platforms in the face of apparent health risks deserves some examination, though. After all, the municipality had previously made use of its inspectorate powers to regulate safety standards of UberEats, circumventing the lack of legal competence in labour affairs, as the respective case study highlighted. Two arguments could explain the absence of such approach as response to the lockdown-driven health risks. The most likely explanation is connected to the City Councillor’s perception of platforms as “indispensable” during the pandemic, when delivery riders presented a lifeline to Milan’s restaurants and workers that were hit hard by months of lockdown. Thus, concerns about the economic health of the city’s large service sector might have trumped considerations of the physical health of platform workers. In that regard, the motivations of municipalities in San

Francisco and Milan were not fundamentally different. The former acted out of an interest to alleviate rising unemployment and offer jobseekers additional ways of earning an income, while the latter was concerned about the negative impact any limitations of platform services could have had on employment in Milan's large service sectors. This explanation would also be supported by the insights unveiled in the case study: the municipality walks a fine line between defending its image as Italy's economic capital and fulfilling the promises of a left-leaning city government that sympathises with the challenges faced by workers. Another possible explanation that follows a similar logic might be that platform work simply was not on top of the list of priorities when faced with a health emergency that hit the Italian city particularly badly. In that case, Milan's experience more closely related to Madrid where "great priority", according to members of Madrid's Employment Agency (Interview 17), was mitigating the rise in unemployment through reskilling programmes.

While the city government struggled to oblige platforms to equip their workers with PPE, platform workers' representatives started to seize on increased public awareness and platform use generated by the pandemic to push for improved working conditions. "[I]t's true that people are using [platform services] more, but people are also paying attention more", hence Milan-based associations of platform workers "realise even more how important it is to leverage the public opinion", in the view of Nidil's representative (Interview 16). Ultimately, rather than using public attention to influence and pressure policymakers to act, they try to replicate the example of Just Eat, a major platform company which has decided to start hiring Italian workers as employees instead of using the category of independent contractor. The company's underlying motivation to be "perceived as good and ethical", in the interview participant's words (Interview 16), should also push other platforms to follow in Just Eat's footsteps.

Therefore, this approach is based on influencing the economic forces that favoured the rising significance of platforms during lockdowns. Local workers' representatives believe that platforms can be convinced to adapt their business model and improve health and safety standards for workers not just through dialogue between stakeholders, which has proven arduous, but crucially through the power of demand. If customers can be made aware of the risky and precarious conditions under which workers executed orders in the pandemic and consequently decide to abandon their preference for app-based services, platforms may be more likely to accept some of the unions' proposals. In the view of unions, the growth of

platforms throughout 2020 does not necessarily imply the permanent entrenchment of these companies in urban areas but instead can be used as pressure point: platforms will have every interest in maintaining their newly won significance and depend on sustained demand to do so. Section 8.4 will return to this issue.

Considering the potential long-term effects for platform services, it is noteworthy that officials in Milan expect the increased presence of platforms to sustain. In its report on urban labour dynamics of 2020, the city's Labour Market Observatory predicts that changed consumer choices, including the taste for online shopping and app-based delivery, will remain a defining feature that favours the growth of platform workers (OML, 2021: 60). As the earlier quote by the Italian researcher on the digitalisation of work mentioned, consumers have been "trained by these periods of lockdown" (Interview 1), which suggests a lasting development in favour of the platform economy. Whether the "platformisation" of the local economies is an inevitable result of the Covid-19 pandemic will be discussed in Section 8.4.

8.3.3 Madrid: platform work not "trendy" among municipal officials

Mirroring the two previous cases, Madrid's municipality did not change its earlier response to app-based work during the pandemic. While the city government had already assigned little urgency to the issue prior to the pandemic (Chapter 7), the changed economic and social contexts in 2020 further led to a deprioritisation of app-based work among urban policymakers. The pandemic's effects on increased unemployment and underemployment became top priorities for the municipality. In the Spanish capital, small businesses in fashion and retail were especially affected by prolonged lockdowns, with consequences on a predominantly female, part-time workforce, according to members of the city government's Employment Agency: "another aspect that is hit [...] by the pandemic is the [small] businesses. Many of them have to be closed. [...] And mostly women, because they were working partially" (Interview 17). The absence of international tourists dealt another blow to the urban economy and caused a "very problematic situation" (Interview 6) for hotels and restaurants and their workers, as a Spanish labour law expert put it during an interview. Furthermore, there were fears that Madrid's situation would not fully recover with the lifting of all lockdown restrictions because state support for businesses and furlough arrangements would end as well, which limited rising unemployment rates to 12,6% (see Table 13), a fear

which the regional Deputy Minister for Labour Affairs expressed: “In the moment that all this protection will fall, imagine the problem” (Interview 13). As the labour law expert explained, “we are going to see in the near future a very, very difficult situation regarding hiring [...] firms just want to save costs” (Interview 6).

A Spanish researcher summarised the challenge faced not only by newly unemployed residents in Madrid but also in other Spanish cities as follows: “many of these people will not have some specific skills, because it's not the same to be working in a restaurant than to be working as a builder” (Interview 8). Reskilling thus was considered the solution to looming unemployment and a priority response to the pandemic by City Hall. In fact, two respondents working for the Employment Agency responsible for Madrid’s workforce strategy confirmed that, “the great priority of the city hall now regarding [...] the employment situation is [...] the reskilling of the unemployed. In order to get into the new labour market [...] after the pandemic” (Interview 17). The decrease of the duration of contracts added to the issue of high unemployment, especially prevalent among young age groups, and reinforced a decades-old challenge. Spain’s national government responded by offering incentives to pay for furloughing workers: according to the regional Deputy Minister, “we have a lot of people in suspension for cause of the coronavirus and companies can get some money in the case [they] recover these people” (Interview 13). Yet, the success of that incentive will hinge on a swift and durable recovery of Madrid’s local economy, which had not realised by mid-2021, as a researcher based in the city explained: “we are still feeling the failures in terms of economic growth and we are going to destroy too much employment” (Interview 8).

Municipal concerns about the increase in unemployment and underemployment also stemmed from the city’s and country’s dualised labour market, as Madrid’s earlier case study already outlined. Short-term contracts epitomise Spain’s labour market with high concentrations of jobs at the top and bottom of the income scale. The welfare state only provides little social protection to low-income earners in part-time jobs and even less for self-employed or independent contractors because the extent of public support, for example unemployment assistance or paid sick leave, depends on previous contributions of employers and employees (Corujo, 2017: 301). Platform workers can be included among those on the disadvantaged side of the polarised labour market due to the irregularity concerning hours and earnings (ibid.: 302). During the pandemic, the lack of entitlement to basic social

protection or additional support mechanisms (Table 14) for such independent contractors exacerbated their pre-existing vulnerabilities: although Madrid's regional government provided financial help to self-employed workers, app-based workers classified under the Spanish T.R.A.D.E. (*Trabajador Autonomo Economicamente Dependiente*) category did not qualify for such support.

Still, platform workers joined the ranks of frontline workers in public services, above all the healthcare sector, in being regarded as essential, meaning that they fulfilled tasks deemed indispensable for the wider urban population, according to a Spanish researcher on precarity: “just as other workers like health workers, etc., the riders have been [...] recognised as an important worker in the economy” (Interview 7). Delivery riders allowed to maintain some sense of normality on one hand, offering at least the culinary experience of going to restaurants, and to adapt to the new health risks on the other by avoiding human proximity. In addition to fulfilling food and grocery deliveries, Glovo – the major Spanish platform company – distributed masks to residents on behalf of Madrid's city government, as the company's CEO stated in its letter to shareholders (Glovo, 2020), and thus actively sought to foster Glovo's image as essential service provider in the pandemic. However, due to concerns among municipal officials about increasing unemployment and underemployment, platform work dropped in the list of priorities in the municipality. According to participants from the city's Employment Agency, the diverse aspects surrounding that kind of work, including the effects of misclassification of workers as self-employed, did not constitute “something trendy” (Interview 17). Nonetheless, the image of platform workers navigating the city while most of the urban population was urged not to leave their homes to avoid a potentially harmful infection might have made the risks and vulnerabilities more tangible. “[T]he pandemic has helped them to [...] visualise the problems”, a Spanish researcher observed, “people have realised [...] the conditions of these workers” (Interview 7). Thus, workers were not simply “human commercials” (Interview 3) for the services offered by platforms but also, in a negative sense, for the business practices they employ and the risks app-based workers face on a daily basis.

In all, the restrictions of public life that characterised lockdowns in San Francisco, Milan, and Madrid not only pushed up demand for platform services but also led to a rise in available platform workers. Therefore, lockdown periods contributed to the temporary entrenchment of platforms in urban economies and labour markets. As MLG has helped to

unveil, the interplay of various factors – above all the recognition of platform workers as essential to local economies, the emergence of other policy challenges, and the support mechanisms provided by higher governmental levels – accounted for the continuity of earlier municipal responses to platform work. While the “platformisation” of urban economies and workforces advanced during the pandemic, it remains to be discussed whether this trend is irreversible. The remaining sections will argue that platforms’ recent growth does not necessarily grant them the freedom to pursue their businesses without greater public inspection or regulation.

8.4 Discussion

The final section will examine potential repercussions of the increased public awareness of platform workers’ conditions. While the growth of platforms and platform work during the Covid-19 pandemic entrenched their presence in the three cities, its spotlight on health and safety risks could also encourage more stringent regulation of that sector. However, there is a risk that policymakers’ attention focuses on the widely perceived but relatively small group of delivery riders, neglecting similar conditions of more dispersed and less visible platform workers. By linking the insights from above analysis to the earlier theoretical considerations on policy (dis)continuity, the section will close with some remarks on the governance of platform work in periods of crises.

8.4.1 Platformisation as product of the pandemic?

The perception of platform workers as essential might have benefitted their image and presented a counterargument to reports about negative externalities caused by the platform economy in urban areas, such as congestion or safety concerns. In contrast to calls for greater regulation of platforms from diverse interest groups in all three cities, which have been explored in earlier chapters, the recognition from city governments in times of lockdowns, such as in Milan or San Francisco, suggests platforms’ temporary transformation from a marginal phenomenon to central actors in urban economies. Thus, it could be argued that the pandemic and subsequent restrictions put in place across the three cities ultimately favoured the concept and operations of platform companies.

However, municipal policy responses to the growth of app-based work and the platform economy following the pandemic need not remain stable in the long run. Although city officials might have focused on different priorities and policy issues during the pandemic, the special social and economic circumstances made app-based workers' precarity, and that of other essential groups, more visible. In fact, the vulnerability of essential workers could receive more attention among city governments once core concerns of the respective municipal offices have been addressed. Castles (2010: 96) argued, for example, that initial impacts of emergency situations are rarely seen as "business of the welfare state" and only over time affect its composition or target groups. Similarly, Kay (2005: 564) pointed to the different levels of policy, including the overarching "policy paradigm" which shapes "how policy-makers interpret" a phenomenon. In that sense, the pandemic could have altered the policy paradigm and the view of platform work among city officials, with tangible changes in policy priorities materialising in the future. Kay's (2005) argument also relates to the significant role of perception in policy (dis)continuity, as elaborated in Section 8.1: increased awareness of the risks and precarity of app-based workers during the pandemic might yet lead to changes in municipal responses.

Non-state actors have started to affect perceptions and the policy agenda as well, as Milan's case showed. The strategy of local workers' representatives to sway the public opinion and depress the demand for platform services holds important implications for the role of policymakers, including on the urban level. Basically, the decision of unions to put greater emphasis on influencing market dynamics in order to force platforms to comply with labour protection standards reflects a failure to achieve improvements for workers through policy tools, be they national labour legislation or local regulations. This is not necessarily a negative trend, if the aim consists of mitigating workers' diverse vulnerabilities through whatever approach. Yet, it should urge policymakers to reflect on their methods and objectives. Evidently, a gap between different layers of regulation continues to exist that exposed a growing number of workers to health risks during lockdowns. From an optimistic viewpoint, the pandemic served to highlight that gap and the need for a recalibration of policy instruments which does not leave platform workers at the mercy of market forces. Indeed, this appears to be an even more pertinent challenge in case unions do not manage to cause any effect on platforms' image and demand. The example of Amazon shows that public awareness for the working conditions in the company's facilities as well as its use of

personal data does not necessarily translate into substantial change in consumer behaviour (Tran et al., 2021). Hence, efforts of unions to seize on workers' increased visibility during the pandemic are important and should be encouraged, but there is no guarantee that they will yield success and as such cannot replace the role of government-led intervention. Contrary to what some interview participants (Interview 3, Interview 13) expressed, namely that market forces should decide the future of platforms and platform work, evidence from the pandemic in the three cities strongly suggests that such approach has not benefitted workers.

8.4.2 Pitfalls of heightened awareness of platform workers

Regulation does not necessarily produce an ideal outcome for platform workers either and needs to be well targeted. Despite the impetus generated by the circumstances of the pandemic, several interview participants remarked that the focus on delivery riders risks neglecting larger groups of platform workers facing similar challenges. As discussed previously, the pandemic supported the visibility of delivery riders through a combination of higher demand and empty urban spaces. With residents being told to stay at home, empty streets and squares further increased their visibility, most notably of delivery riders whose number almost doubled, as an Italian researcher stressed, “regardless of the personal opinion, everyone can see them [...] in empty streets during the lockdown” (Interview 1). Another academic in Milan pointed out that platform companies' jackets and delivery boxes attracted attention and basically advertised that platforms continued to operate even if most of the local businesses were shut: “those people working for Deliveroo, Glovo and UberEats [...] basically they are forced even to be a human commercial of the product because they wear the uniform” (Interview 3).

Yet, a researcher based in Milan cautioned that, “If you need to have a jacket, a luminous jacket and go in the middle of the street to have someone caring about you, we have a problem” (Interview 5). Another Italian academic referred to this phenomenon as, “the dark side of the visibility”: “you tend to consider those that are more active” (Interview 1). His use of the word “active” points to two larger issues: one concerns the visibility in public spaces, where delivery riders are advantaged. The other captures workers' ability to organise and make their claims heard, where riders and unions have also been more successful.

Therefore, the challenge consists not only of making certain platform workers more visible, but of organising them in a way that strengthens their voice. The latter has proven particularly difficult with the two emerging platforms in Milan during the pandemic, *Helping* and *WashOut*. Despite their growth in number of workers, the nature of their activity working in customers' homes and garages makes them less visible on streets and squares and thus more challenging to organise. They consequently have "fewer opportunities to join forces and to make their claims", the Italian researcher further reported (Interview 1). This is not just because unions find it harder to locate and approach them, but also because these workers are less likely to connect with each other in public places like riders do.

Going a step further, the imbalance in public attention also exhibits a gender dimension, as already indicated in Chapter 6. Delivery riders and ride-hailing drivers tend to be male while workers of cleaning platforms like *Helping* are predominantly female, another Italian academic underlined (Interview 5). There is a risk that the focus of public intervention or regulation on more visible workers perpetuates disadvantages and inequalities among platform workers in the digital economy, especially if the growth of this type of work becomes a permanent and defining feature of urban labour markets. If workers' representatives manage to seize the momentum of the pandemic and turn reports about vulnerable working conditions into arguments for change, the needs of diverse categories of platform workers deserve greater attention.

Hence, if the pandemic's legacy consists of increased public awareness of the vulnerabilities of urban platform workers as well as unions' eagerness to seize on the public opinion to affect practical or legal change in working conditions, policymakers should be careful about the design and objectives of their policy tools. An increased and more diverse pool of platform workers likely requires different policy solutions. The most visible workers in cities might not be the ones in greatest need of intervention. Public health emergencies, such as the pandemic, pose additional challenges to health and safety that might not be alleviated by repeatedly proposed means of regulation alone, such as classifying riders as employees. If legislation covering platform work on the regional or national level is either too broad or insufficient to protect workers during a pandemic, as the increased vulnerabilities in all three cases suggest they are, granting cities more extensive competences could allow for more targeted policies that closes the regulatory gap. These are some of the points that shall also be taken into account in the discussion chapter (Chapter 9).

8.4.3 Platform work governance in times of crises

Ultimately, studying the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on municipal governance of platform work in the three present cases has brought to the fore municipal officials' view of platform work vis-à-vis other policy issues, as MLG indicator 1 revealed, and the general lack of urgency pertaining to it. In all cases, the pandemic demonstrated how app-based work was and has been considered a minor challenge or, to the contrary, even a benefit for the cities. San Francisco's policymakers regarded platform work as important tool in the fight against exploding levels of unemployment. In Milan, the city government pursued its dual approach of recognising platforms' essential contributions to the local economy while providing PPE to some workers. Meanwhile, Madrid's officials continued their reluctance to engage with app-based work and focused on combatting part-time work arrangements in the urban labour market. In combination with other MLG indicators, this helps to account for the continuity of previous responses to app-based work during the pandemic. As Capano et al. (2020) observed on the national level, some European governments reacted to the pandemic by relying on existing policy structures rather than creating new ones. This finding offers relevant lessons for the present analysis, too. Particularly in Milan, the existence of a regular roundtable might have been crucial in allowing platform workers to alert the municipality of workers' exacerbated health risks, resulting in limited provision of PPE.

For the sake of clarification, the respective municipal responses reflect continuity insofar as they were reinforced: although one might argue that the deprioritisation of platform work constitutes a discontinuity or change in responses, it seems more accurate to state that municipalities doubled down on their earlier approaches to the phenomenon. Proponents of path dependency (Pierson, 2000; Castles, 2010) might say that the three city governments pursued their respective policy paths, and that the shock of the pandemic to established policy processes was not enough to upset them. Covid-19 did not fulfil the "game changer" (Avelino et al., 2014: 5) potential of a crisis. Thus viewed, the responses by municipalities in Madrid, Milan and San Francisco were continuations of previous approaches to platform work.

A final consideration should address the nature of the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences for platform work governance. Since theories on policy change have underlined the importance of perception in governments' responses to crises or emergencies, as Section 8.1 discussed, data collection through semi-structured interviews deliberately asked relevant policymakers about their preoccupations during the pandemic, which were analysed in Section 8.3. One caveat of that approach, perhaps obvious though not less relevant, could be that different kinds of crises might affect the municipal responses to platform work differently. For instance, the social effects of a financial crisis could shed a different light on app-based workers and elicit another reaction by city governments than the pandemic's health emergency. Similarly, cities where the pandemic did not lead to comparable economic impacts (though still to considerable human cost), for instance in Scandinavian countries like Sweden, might have experienced no changes in the municipal governance of app-based work because the nature of the pandemic was perceived differently. Hence, just because the pandemic revealed the deprioritisation of platform work in San Francisco and Madrid, and reflected contrasting priorities in Milan, it does not necessarily allow for generalisations for other types of emergencies, or even for the same period in different urban conglomerates. Put differently, the findings presented here are likely to be context- and time-specific. However, they also point to a potential avenue for future research, namely the investigation of how variations in a city's social, political or economic climate – such as economic downturns or even changes in municipal governments – result in changed perceptions of, and new responses to, platform work. These are crucial issues that have hitherto not been addressed in the literature, but which deserve greater attention if the reasons for workers' ongoing precarity in cities shall be understood from a governance perspective.

8.5 Conclusion: insights for governing platform work in times of health emergencies

The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the intrinsic connection between cities, platforms, and their workers – dense physical spaces, digital technology, and human beings – which produced short-term gains for platform companies yet might result in greater regulation in the long run. On one hand, lockdowns catalysed the growth and significance of platform work in the three urban labour markets. It became an important source of work and income for jobseekers, to an extent that even reinforced the position of San Francisco's City Hall to

recognise platform work as a “win” (Interview 10). Meanwhile, preoccupation with the survival of its service sector in Milan and concerns about rising underemployment and unemployment in Madrid attracted the attention of urban policymakers in areas other than platform work. To repeat the observations of interview participants in San Francisco and Madrid, discussions about precarious and platform work became “deprioritised” (Interview 10) and constituted nothing “trendy” (Interview 17) due to the diverse repercussions of the pandemic on urban labour markets. On the other, increased visibility of delivery riders clearly highlighted the health and safety risks of this kind of work, further exacerbated due to Covid-19. Digital tools shifted vulnerabilities from platform users to platform workers, adding to their precarity.

What are the lessons for other cities, who experience both a rising presence of platform work and a health emergency, from the insights of the three cases? The preceding analysis demonstrates that several steps can be undertaken to help app-based workers alleviate additional risks irrespectively of national or regional policy frameworks on this kind of work. These steps can include the following, in no particular order: first, generate data by mapping which groups of platform workers have recently grown and might require support. It is not necessarily the most visible groups that are in greatest need. Second, enter into dialogue with platforms, establish which provisions are being undertaken to help their workers mitigate health risks, and fill any potential gap, for example by distributing PPE. Milan’s case has shown that it can be a challenging endeavour to convince platforms to adopt stricter safety measures, increasing the need for action by the municipality. Third, consult with associations and representatives of workers to identify their needs. Delivery riders, ride-hailing drivers, cleaners, or shoppers, just to name a few, might each face particular struggles or risks generated by the circumstances of the pandemic. Fourth, issue emergency payments or a temporary basic income for platform workers. Financial precarity might otherwise force workers to expose themselves to hazards related to their assignments, like a potential infection, as evidence from San Francisco suggested. Fifth, recognise the essential contribution of platform workers. Although essentialness does not necessarily produce tangible improvements, recognition of workers’ role in maintaining highly demanded services could be a significant step in a revaluation of platform work that leads to greater awareness of their needs and vulnerabilities in the future.

In that regard, the present analysis of platform work in the pandemic has moreover highlighted the benefits of analysing such work through an urban lens. Not only has it pointed to the repercussions of densely populated urban areas for the growth as well as risks of app-based workers, but it has also demonstrated how a lack of legal competence in the hands of city governments can leave workers vulnerable. The analysis of Milan suggested that even when cities decided to act and attempted to put in place safety measures for platform workers, platform companies could not be forced to support the municipality and adopt the proposed safety measures. Studying the pandemic period as one important episode in the development of urban platform work thus has raised several questions about crucial factors that will determine its future: about the gap between different levels of regulation, about the role of public awareness in affecting change in working conditions, and about the priorities of municipalities in times of health and economic emergencies. Chapter 10 will also return to an evaluation of MLG for analysing governance processes of app-based work at different points in time. First, though, the discussion chapter will engage in a “contextualized comparison” (Locke et al., 1995: 338) of the three cases and highlight common themes which MLG allows to unveil.

9. Discussion – Lessons from a contextualised comparison of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco

Prima facie, the three case studies showcase three highly diverse municipal responses to platform work, and three different MLG arrangements. San Francisco's municipality considers app-based work an opportunity for jobseekers, while debates surrounding the classification of platform workers as employees take place on California's state level. In Milan, the city government takes a proactive approach to the issue, holding regular consultations with workers' and platforms' representatives, and tries to balance urban innovation with protection of workers' rights. Madrid's case reflects both the reluctance of city officials to recommend platform work to unemployed residents and the municipality's decision not to engage in related debates, against the backdrop of Spain's Rider Law. Despite such contrasting approaches to app-based work and the various contexts within which the issue is governed, as Table 15 reflects, the MLG indicators reveal underlying similarities across the three cases. It is the purpose of this chapter to uncover these parallels from the empirical evidence and present the lessons for platform work governance that can be drawn from the MLG analysis. MLG analysis refers to the examination of the diverse MLG arrangements.

The discussion chapter is structured in two sections. Section 9.1 will demonstrate the value of MLG in both explaining each municipal response to app-based work as well as in unveiling the common features across the three cities. Although each case reflects a distinct response to platform work, comparable influences are visible in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco. By discussing each of the four MLG indicators in turn and relating it to insights from the existing literature on platform governance, it will be shown that MLG sheds light on how these indicators are related. Furthermore, the section will engage with Courmont's (2018: 20) argument that understanding the impacts of digital trends requires their analysis within the local contexts in which they emerge: it will discuss how MLG arrangements capture the contexts of the three cities and thus convey the extent of platforms' embeddedness in urban areas. Section 9.2 will then turn to considering three lessons from the MLG analysis of the case studies. These lessons include the significance of municipal officials' perception of app-based work in shaping responses to the phenomenon, the difference between platform governance and platform work governance in cities, and the

influential role city governments can play in mitigating workers' precarity or promoting such work. Crucially, it will be shown how the lessons reflect both the significant position of city governments in managing app-based work as well as the flexibility of platform work governance. Even though restricted competences or the roles of non-state actors limit the influence of municipalities, flexibility in terms of soft policy instruments or the ability to set municipal policy priorities grants city officials power in supporting workers or promoting platforms. These constitute significant insights for the study of platform work governance.

The methods chapter (Chapter 4) elaborated on the need for a "contextualized comparison" (Locke et al., 1995: 338) of cases, which will be applied here. Such comparison emphasises parallels in seemingly different cases, producing a richer understanding of the issue in question and how it interacts with local conditions. Contextualised comparisons thus can help visualise how the global trend of platform work has provoked different reactions across the three cities, due to city-specific influences identified through the MLG framework.

9.1 Diverse responses, yet similar influences

This section will argue that the MLG analysis not only captures the influences behind each municipal response comprehensively, but it also alerts to crucial differences and parallels between the three cities. Although the case studies of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco suggested different municipal responses to platform work influenced by distinct MLG arrangements, analysing the MLG indicators allows to uncover underlying parallels across the cases. After contrasting the three different responses as well as the MLG arrangements behind them, the discussion of each MLG indicator will show that the roles of non-state actors and available competences show similarities across cases. These similarities are rooted in the comparable concerns and demands among non-state actors as well as the lack of relevant legislative powers on city level. Yet, crucial differences in municipal perceptions of app-based work and roles of governmental hierarchies ultimately contribute to diverse responses. Hence, considering the four indicators in tandem, and how they are related, creates a nuanced reflection of the influences on platform work governance in each of the cities.

Table 15: Values of the four multi-level governance indicators in each case.

MLG indicators	San Francisco (USA)	Milan (Italy)	Madrid (Spain)
1. Roles, views, & involvement of non-state actors	Major platforms oppose Assembly Bill 5 (AB 5), threaten relocation to other cities, and fund political campaigns in the city; workers organise in collectives but lack resources to lobby or campaign	Worker collectives and established unions publicly protest against work conditions; platforms organise through interest groups; both groups enjoy access to talks on national and city levels	Workers oppose platforms through platform collectives and cooperatives; some platforms undermine Spain's Rider Law; consultations with the regional government
2. Relationship between governmental levels regarding platform work	Main initiative for reclassifying workers as employees on Californian state-level (AB 5), though exemptions due to Proposition 22; limited role for US federal government in legislative processes	Apart from 2019 Riders Decree no comprehensive solutions on national governmental level, yet ongoing negotiations between stakeholders (workers and platforms) with Italy's Labour Ministry; other Italian cities actively support workers	Classification of workers as employees through nationwide Rider Law; the regional Employment Ministry engages with stakeholders, despite lack of legislative powers
3. Availability of competences and instruments on municipal level	Absence of relevant labour or social security law competences, though availability of city-specific minimum wage and healthcare for employees	Absence of relevant labour or social security law competences	Absence of relevant labour or social security law competences
4. Involvement of the municipality in the policy debate on platform work	Officials of municipal OEWD department perceive platform work as opportunity for poor or unemployed residents and want to attract platforms' headquarters to the city	Municipality recognises lack of competences on labour law, yet seeks to balance the continuation of innovative platform services with workers' rights	Municipal officials of Madrid's Employment Agency do not assign urgency to platform work and focus on mitigating underemployment in the city

9.1.1 Contrasting three cases, three responses, and three MLG arrangements

Empirically, the cities of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco showcase three distinct cases of platform work governance, influenced by distinct MLG arrangements. MLG arrangements refer to the city-specific combinations of the four indicators' values: see Table 15 for a summary of each indicators' value from the preceding case studies. The arrangements thus enlighten the context in which platform work is governed. In each case, previous studies offered some clues as to how city officials manage the platform economy. Yet, a consideration of the MLG arrangements conveys a more comprehensive picture of the influences behind these responses.

First, the case of San Francisco: the municipality's decision to embrace platform work for jobseekers has arisen within a particular context. As California's state government attempts to end the misclassification of independent contractors on platforms through AB 5, the city government considers app-based work a remedy against the high living costs driven by the competitive local economy. Platform work thus fulfils a crucial task in the municipal management of the local externalities of Silicon Valley. Furthermore, city officials welcome the presence of platforms' headquarters and seek to attract businesses to the city. The role of platforms in opposing California's AB 5 is decisive, since platforms invest large resources in political campaigns and threaten to relocate their headquarters to other US cities in case of stricter regulation of platforms and platform work. The MLG analysis has thus confirmed earlier findings by McNeill (2016) and Flores et al. (2017) that platforms are powerful actors in the city and that the municipality is interested in creating a favourable environment for them, respectively. Going beyond these insights, it has provided a more nuanced explanation of the municipal response. The four MLG indicators reveal how the city government manages the tensions between limited competences pertaining to labour law, the need to support poor or unemployed residents, and the desire to attract innovative platform companies.

Second, Milan's case has been characterised by the municipality's proactive response to easing the tensions between platforms and their workers, facilitated by the municipal Councillor for Labour Policies. Against the backdrop of a weak Riders Decree and insufficient progress in negotiations between stakeholders – workers, platforms, and Labour

Ministry – on the national level and workers’ protests on city level, the municipality holds a monthly roundtable. The roundtable has resulted in changes in local transportation rules and proposals for a Rider Spot, though the municipality’s reliance on platforms to finance the Rider Spot has granted them power over a potentially significant project. The municipality’s proactive approach is also influenced by city officials’ motivation to both support workers’ interests and promote Milan as Italian innovation hub, to which platforms are considered by the municipality to contribute. Studies by Dell’Agnese et al. (2011) and Di Vita (2019) indicated that the municipal engagement with non-state actors generally, not just in terms of platforms, mirrors the city government’s difficulty at managing the challenges arising from the complex urban economy and society. MLG analysis indicates similar reasons for the response to app-based work, namely the attempt to manage the tensions between workers and platforms through dialogue and mediation. MLG also uncovers the pressure from other Italian city governments to address the discontent of platform workers, which, combined with the lack of nation-wide solutions, can explain the proactive response more comprehensively.

Third, in Madrid, the lack of urgency among municipal officials and their unwillingness to engage with debates regarding platform work mirror yet another MLG arrangement. Key element to the arrangement is the national Rider Law, aiming to reclassify workers as employees of platforms and thus entitling them to employment-related benefits. Non-state actors – workers’ and platforms’ representatives – are not part of any municipal consultations on platform work and thus seek to share their views on the issue through other channels. The regional government is open to engage with workers and platforms, though lacking competences that could respond to their demands. An earlier study (Ardura Urquiaga et al., 2019) already suggested that Madrid’s city government does not view the platform economy with great urgency, because other Spanish cities would be more severely affected by its negative externalities, such as rising rents. The MLG analysis allows for a more nuanced look behind the municipal response: it suggests that the combination of a nation-wide law targeting the misclassification of workers, the prioritisation of different municipal policy issues including the mitigation of underemployment, and non-state actors’ pressure on other governmental levels are key influences.

What thus emerges from the three cases is the connection between the four indicators: though capturing different aspects of platform work governance, these aspects influence each other.

For instance, the governmental hierarchy and the level on which the tensions surrounding platform work are addressed can affect how non-state actors engage with municipalities, and they can also affect the sense of urgency to act on the issue among city officials. This interplay is a crucial insight from contrasting the three cases: analysing their respective MLG arrangements allows to highlight how the indicators can be related, and it conveys the complexity of each city's governance context concerning platform work. Yet, exclusively studying each city on its own would not enlighten the extent to which indicators' values are comparable across cases, and it would not produce more widely applicable findings on platform work governance in cities. The next section will pay close attention to the interplay or relationship between the four indicators and consider possible explanations for similarities and differences in MLG arrangements. Lessons from these variations and parallels will be discussed in Section 9.2.

9.1.2 Explaining parallels and variations of MLG indicators across cases

The following paragraphs will argue that MLG not only paints a more complete picture of why platform work is governed differently in each case, as demonstrated above, but it also points to the parallels across the three cities. Referring to the existing literature, it will be shown how earlier studies have explained the roles of the respective indicators in other cases of platform regulation, and how the present analysis complements and refines those studies. For that purpose, each indicator and its value in the three cities shall now be considered in turn.

9.1.2.1 *Influence of non-state actors*

First, indicator 1 alerted to the involvement of non-state actors in municipal governance processes of platform work. Several earlier studies identified non-state actors as important influences on regulation of platforms. Aguilera et al. (2019), for instance, argued that local non-state actors play a crucial role in politicising flat-sharing platforms in cities and urging policymakers to act. Meanwhile, Thelen (2018) alerted to the differences among seemingly comparable stakeholder groups in various countries, observing distinct alignments and agreements between platforms, workers, or regulators. In the three present cases, non-state actors indeed are an important element in explaining how city governments respond to

platform work. However, their importance in shaping the respective municipal response is related to other indicators, such as the willingness of city officials to engage with them, as argued below.

Analysing the first indicator suggests that platform work produces similar tensions between groups of non-state actors across all three cases. This does not imply that non-state actors are equally influential or well organised in different locations. However, their interests are broadly comparable. In Madrid, Milan, as well as San Francisco, workers' representatives not only push for comparable demands, for example an hourly wage, transparency in rating and gig allocation mechanisms, or involvement in corporate consultations, but are also eager to engage with policymakers. Yet, types and extent of engagement vary between the three cities, depending on established channels where different groups can provide input and on city governments' openness to interact with them. Similarly, platforms and related interest groups seek engagement with policymakers, though not exclusively on the municipal level. In Madrid's case, platforms as well as workers and unions target the regional level since neither the city nor the national government are open to talks. In Milan, all organised stakeholders – unions, platform workers' associations, platforms, platforms' interest groups – are active in municipal and national fora. San Francisco witnesses the presence of workers' representatives, businesses, and platforms on city level and on California-wide level where relevant legislation is implemented. Hence, though holding similar views in all three cities, non-state actors' leeway for influencing municipal responses hinges on the willingness of different governmental levels to listen to them.

The parallels indicated by the first indicator are not surprising, as app-based work creates comparable tensions between stakeholders. The way workers' representatives and unions have formed national and international networks to exchange experiences and strategies, as the networks Riders for Rights or Jobs with Justice indicate, presents one likely explanation for the similarities in the three cases. Indeed, Chesta et al. (2019) found that platform collectives organise and mobilise by learning from each other. Concerning the interests of platform companies, they exhibit parallels, too, though with some exceptions. While most companies seek to operate with the lowest extent of public regulation and defend the independent contractor model of self-employed workers (Wolf, 2022), Just Eat presented a notable exception in the cases of Milan and Madrid for employing its workers, which in turn resulted in a more collaborative approach with city officials in Milan relative to other

platforms. Though this might convey a simplified and superficial image of platforms' interests, documents from all three cities reflected them as core concerns of the respective interest groups Adigital or APS in Madrid, AssoDelivery in Milan, and SF.citi in San Francisco. Platforms' defence of the independent contractor model and opposition to regulation has also been confirmed in other studies (Cherry et al., 2017; Prassl, 2018).

9.1.2.2 *Governmental hierarchies*

The second MLG indicator reflects the relationship between various governmental levels regarding app-based work. The importance of governmental hierarchies in governing platforms was underlined in a study by Tabascio et al. (2021). Examining the responses of Canadian city governments to ride-hailing platforms, their analysis showed how municipalities can assume greater roles in the regulation of platforms when other governmental levels do not engage in the issue. Still, the three MLG arrangements reflect a more nuanced picture of the impact of governmental hierarchies, as these can be related to the influence of non-state actors or the perception of app-based work by municipalities. Non-state actors might push city governments to take greater action than the national government, for instance by even simply leading consultations with stakeholders, while municipal officials can decide to promote platform work – for example by leading jobseekers towards it – despite nation-wide legislation aiming to curb the use of independent contractors.

Empirically, the indicator unveils crucial variations between Madrid and San Francisco on one hand, and Milan on the other. The former two cases are marked by the initiatives taken by higher governmental authorities with regard to platform work, namely the national Rider Law and California's AB 5, respectively. Both measures not only aim to reclassify all app-based workers as employees, thus granting them access to employment-related social benefits, but they also alleviate pressure from municipalities to intervene in platform work or address workers' vulnerabilities. Furthermore, Madrid represents a special case as the regional government acts as intermediary between workers' representatives and the Spanish government. In contrast, Milan exhibits a relative lack of progress on regional and national levels, with a Riders Decree that leaves key aspects of app-based work to be negotiated, increasing the pressure on the city government to manage the demands of workers and steer local tensions between the various stakeholders. Variations regarding this indicator matter,

because the presence of measures targeting platform work on higher levels was mentioned as reason for less engagement on municipal level, above all in Madrid's case. Meanwhile, the insufficiency of measures could strengthen the position of workers' representatives in calling for support from the city government, as in Milan. Once again, the three cases underline the interplay of governmental hierarchies with different MLG indicators, and how it affects the responses of city governments.

9.1.2.3 *Availability of competences and instruments*

Turning to the municipal level, indicator 3 focuses on the availability of competences and instruments relevant to the issue of platform work, which reveals parallels between the three cities. Previous research (Rauch et al., 2015) pointed to possible municipal interventions in the platform economy, but also to city governments' inability to tackle the precarity of platform workers, as Wolf (2022) indicated. Their research helps understand the limits of and potentials for intervention on municipal level, yet the tools city governments can employ to steer or govern app-based work are much more varied.

Formal regulatory competences in labour and social security law – which have been regarded major instruments for the improvement of working conditions on platforms and workers' entitlement to social benefits (Esbenshade et al., 2019) – are absent in the three cities. Nonetheless, such constraint does not preclude the use of atypical policy instruments, as indeed the cases demonstrate. The use of such soft policy instruments in cities as means to overcome the lack of competences held by other governmental entities has been widely observed relating to various policy issues, as Majoor et al. (2015)'s work on instruments of urban governance emphasised. In relation to the platform economy, previous research (Morell, 2018; Voytenko Palgan et al., 2021) has found the widespread use of soft instruments as well, for instance in the forms of holding consultations, closing agreements, or incentivising compliance with local regulation. It should be mentioned that municipalities do hold regulatory powers over platforms, as San Francisco's congestion tax on ride-hailing companies highlighted. San Francisco also serves as example of city-specific labour standards instituted and enforced by the city government – including a minimum wage and city-provided healthcare – yet these concern rights for employees, not independent

contractors. Consequently, powers of the three municipalities do not apply to issues surrounding app-based work and respective welfare entitlements.

That lack of legislative competences does not prevent the respective city officials from responding to the growth of platform work. The decision of Madrid's city government not to recommend app-based work to jobseekers, despite high unemployment levels, constitutes a simple yet significant step to achieve the objective of fighting underemployment. San Francisco's opposite stance, namely the municipal choice to recognise such work as positive outcome for unemployed residents, allows City Hall to pursue its aim of promoting job growth. The municipality of Milan shows the greatest variety in soft policy instruments, resorting to consultations, negotiation, and mediation between stakeholders. City governments thus have some influence over the conditions of workers and platforms in cities, despite an absence of relevant legislative powers. This insight will receive greater attention in Section 9.2.

9.1.2.4 Municipal involvement

Lastly, the involvement of the respective municipalities in the policy debate on platform work is subject of the fourth indicator. The question of why some city governments are more likely to engage in debates surrounding the platform economy or app-based work – through regulation or soft policy instruments – has been partly enlightened by previous research. Ardura Urquiaga et al. (2019) noted in Madrid's case the absence of municipal regulation in the flat-sharing sector due to the belief that other cities would be more heavily affected by it, while Flores et al. (2017) identified the desire for innovation in San Francisco's reluctance to regulate ride-hailing services. Through the fourth indicator, MLG as conceptualised earlier (Chapter 3) alerts to the policy priorities of city officials and their perception of platform work, including the role officials think platforms can or should play in the local economy.

In the present cases, significant variations come to light, since each city government has different motivations to engage with app-based work. Their motivations are often influenced by factors revealed by other MLG indicators. For Madrid's municipality, there is little

urgency assigned to the phenomenon due to prospects of a nation-wide legal provision, Spain's Rider Law, tackling the precarities of respective workers. Instead, other challenges on the municipal agenda are deemed more important, above all unemployment and underemployment. In Milan, the city government feels the need to engage with the topic due to pressures from strong labour unions and other Italian cities, as well as due to the insufficiency of national negotiations between workers, unions, and the Labour Ministry. Meanwhile, San Francisco's City Hall is concerned about rampant poverty and homelessness, for which app-based work is considered a remedy by municipal officials. Thus, platform work holds very diverse levels of priority or urgency for each city government. The Covid-19 pandemic clearly represented the importance of perception, when app-based work became de-prioritised by city governments: Section 9.2 will return to this example, discuss the significance of platforms' perception by city officials, and demonstrate the significant position municipalities hold in platform work governance.

9.1.3 Understanding context and platforms' embeddedness in cities

The literature review in Chapter 2 emphasised Courmont's (2018: 20) argument that understanding governmental responses to digital trends, including the rise of platform work, requires consideration of the specific local contexts in which they arise. As governance approaches (Pierre, 1999; DiGaetano et al., 2003) generally stress, policy choices result from the need to navigate institutional constraints and a myriad of stakeholders, and these dynamics – revealed by the MLG framework – have been found to be key in accounting for the management of the phenomenon by city governments, too. At the same time, the present analysis serves as confirmation of Kaufmann et al.'s (2020) point that municipal policies should be studied through MLG approaches, as city governments find themselves at the intersection of governmental hierarchies and non-state actors' interests.

In other words, the great value of MLG's application to platform work governance consists of its ability to shed light on the influence of context on the municipal responses. In tandem, the four indicators convey a picture of the respective context, or MLG arrangement, in each case. Single indicators would not have captured the complex relationship between indicators and how they can relate to each other, with consequences for the municipal response to platform work. The use of MLG to capture the urban context in which platform work is

governed thus helps to better understand in what ways platforms are “embedded” (Howson et al., 2021: 634) in cities. In addition to the technology and business operation aspects, including the need for infrastructure and population density of cities, MLG shows how platforms and platform work are shaped by specific institutions and actors: these include national regulation, pressure from local workers’ or platforms’ representatives, and the policy priorities of city officials. The following section will discuss what lessons for the role of city governments in platform work governance can be drawn from the MLG analysis of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco.

9.2 Municipalities to the fore: 3 lessons from MLG analysis

Based on the preceding comparison of MLG arrangements in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco, three lessons can be learnt for the influence of city governments in platform work governance. One is that the perception, or framing (Vith et al., 2019), of app-based work matters. Another is the difference between municipal responses to platforms more broadly in contrast to platform work specifically. The third lesson relates to the ability of municipalities to encourage the growth of platform work, support app-based workers, or both, despite constrained competences. These lessons will emphasise two significant elements of platform work governance in cities: first, the important role of city governments in managing platform work in cities, and second, the flexibility of platform work governance. These two elements go hand in hand: the availability of soft policy instruments and ability to promote own policy priorities allow municipal officials to steer app-based work even when legislative measures on higher governmental levels seek to address the misclassification of workers.

9.2.1 The significance of perception

First, the perception of platform work by municipal officials, and the role officials assign to such work in the local economy, appear to hold a significant influence over municipal responses. Importantly, MLG sheds light on the reasons for their significance. Earlier studies, above all by Thelen (2018) and Aguilera et al. (2019) already hinted at the role of framing in shaping policy responses. The former found that the regulatory responses of national governments depended on the policy issues through which platforms’ emergence

was framed, for example taxation, consumer safety, or competition. Comparing responses in European cities, Aguilera et al. argued that non-state actors can politicise the platform economy by highlighting its positive or negative externalities in the public discourse.

Apart from reflecting the significance of how app-based work is perceived by municipal officials, MLG provides another additional insight compared to the studies mentioned above. It stresses the critical role of city governments in debates surrounding platform work. Perception is not solely shaped by other actors, as Thelen (2018) suggested, but city officials bring their own priorities and preoccupations to the issue of platform work. In the three present cases, this could be seen by how San Francisco's municipality considers such work an opportunity, how Milan's municipality regards it as expression of innovation, and how Madrid's municipality does not assign it urgency. Workers' representatives and platform managers do have a stake in framing platform work, and the argument of "platform power" (Culpepper et al., 2020: 288) supported the view that simply the availability of platform services can frame platforms as indispensable to urban residents. Still, any analysis of the framing of platform work needs to take municipal priorities and officials' perception of the issue into consideration. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the significance of municipal perception came to the fore particularly clearly, as the respective chapter unveiled. Against the backdrop of lockdowns and unemployment, both the de-prioritisation of platform work by city governments in Madrid and San Francisco, and the realisation that platform work fulfils crucial roles for urban dwellers in Milan, were crucial in the continuation of previous responses to such work. Hence, municipalities can regard app-based work as means to an end, such as for creating jobs, fighting poverty, or fostering digital innovation. Artioli (2018: 19) argued that city governments "have different political and economic interests prompting them to promote or resist" the platform economy, and the present consideration of how perception relates to other MLG indicators supports her point.

For the governance of platform work, this insight suggests that municipal responses can easily change over time as perception of app-based work changes. For instance, a change in government could affect whether municipal officials view such work with concern and thus are willing to support platform workers. In Milan's case, the Councillor for Labour Policies emphasised the municipality's motivation to protect the "rights of all precarious workers" (Interview 12). However, the directly elected mayor and current municipal government are supported by a left-wing coalition of parties, and the election of a right-wing mayoral

candidate could affect the willingness to engage with workers' concerns and hold the monthly roundtable. This scope for flexibility captures the influence municipal governments, and individuals within them, can have on platform work governance, as Section 9.2.3 will stress.

9.2.2 Regulating platforms versus governing platform work

Another important lesson stems from the different municipal responses to the platform economy *within* cities. The three cases demonstrate how municipal responses to the platform economy more broadly are not necessarily synonymous to responses to platform work. MLG analysis thus confirms Brail's (2018) insight from Canadian cities that municipal regulation of platforms is specific to the sector in question, such as delivery platforms. In Milan, the municipality has entered a cooperation agreement with flat-sharing platform Airbnb, yet it has also taken steps to crack down on violations of health and safety standards by delivery platforms. This stance reflects the city governments' attempts at balancing the desire for innovation with protection of workers' rights. In San Francisco, differences became apparent even regarding the same types of platforms: while the municipality has introduced a congestion tax on ride-hailing platforms, for example Uber and Lyft, it welcomes work on such platforms as remedy against poverty. Thus, empirically, the cases suggest that platform work governance can be distinct from municipal responses to the platform economy more broadly.

Although it could be argued that these differences result from conflicting priorities of different groups or departments within the respective municipalities, interviewees suggested that city officials did not regard diverse responses to the platform economy as contradictory. Milan's Municipal Councillor underlined the contribution of platforms to the local economy despite concerns for workers' welfare, for example, while San Francisco's Chief Economist showed awareness of both the widespread precarity among app-based workers and the opportunities such work holds for poor residents. In all, this lesson once more emphasises the relevance of studying platform work governance as separate subject from, though related to, platform governance. It also underscores the value of MLG in revealing the influences behind municipal responses to app-based work that might appear contradictory to responses in other sectors.

9.2.3 Power of, and power to, municipal policymakers?

Since this research is concerned with the (in)action of city governments regarding app-based work, it needs to be asked whether more extensive competences, particularly in labour or social security law, would lead to greater municipal intervention. One common theme of the three case studies consists of the active role of municipal officials. Compared to previous studies, for example Prassl (2018) or Culpepper et al.'s (2020) analysis of platforms' power in evading regulation, they have been shown to hold more agency and decide whether to engage in debates surrounding platform work. However, agency itself, or level of involvement in related policy debates, offered no indication of the nature of the respective municipal response, as the differences between Milan and San Francisco highlighted most clearly. In both cities, municipalities actively engage in debates surrounding app-based work, yet they employ different instruments and pursue diverse objectives.

The empirical evidence highlighted that city officials can support platform workers, contribute to the growth of platform work, or even do both. Milan's case demonstrated how municipalities can support workers, including through regular consultations and changes in transportation rules favouring app-based workers. Still, city governments are also able to contribute to the growth of such work, as the municipal decision to embrace platform work for jobseekers in San Francisco highlighted. Interestingly, there even is leeway for pursuing both approaches, acting in workers' interests while also enabling the presence of platforms at the same time, the analysis of Milan showed. In the Italian city, the decision to engage with workers while welcoming the operation of platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic aligns with interests of workers as well as platforms. This insight, in turn, questions the assumption that granting city governments more extensive competences pertaining to labour issues and platform work would necessarily improve workers' conditions and welfare entitlements. The factors influencing municipal responses to app-based work are more variegated than simply an outcome of greater or fewer competences, MLG analysis reveals. Indeed, all three municipalities face constrained competences pertaining to the legal classification of workers or social security law, and still some of them go further in managing app-based work and supporting platform workers' rights than others, with Milan's municipality being particularly proactive, for reasons outlined in the respective case study (Chapter 6).

Three conclusions can be drawn from this insight. First, the willingness to act in support of workers represents a key aspect in accounting for the choice of response and does not solely depend on the presence of regulatory or legislative powers on city level. The earlier discussion of the role of perception elaborated on this point. Second, city governments have a stake in the discussions surrounding app-based work, even in the face of governmental hierarchies that concentrate relevant competences on higher levels or despite non-state actors who are sometimes able to influence governance processes. Therefore, municipalities can affect the power constellation concerning platform work governance in their favour, assuming greater influence or responsibility and challenging the limits reflected by other indicators. This represents an important insight, considering reports (Sadowski, 2020; Culpepper et al., 2020; Wolf, 2022) that platforms seek to undermine sovereignty and influence of policymakers in cities.

The third conclusion relates to the nature of platform work governance, which is neither fixed nor stable. Put differently, limited competences or the exclusion from consultations on higher governmental levels do not hinder city governments from pursuing their own aims or using app-based work to fulfil other “public interest objectives” (Colomb et al., 2023: 1), for example job creation. In fact, platform work governance is flexible, offering leeway to individuals or groups of actors within municipalities to influence the municipal response. For instance, the use of soft policy instruments by city governments in all three cases – whether in the organisation of roundtables, or in the signing of cooperation agreements – demonstrates municipalities’ scope for action even when higher governmental levels put in place legislative measures tackling workers’ misclassification. Individuals have been able to take initiative in local debates surrounding platform work, though not necessarily with significant impact. In Milan, for example, the municipal Councillor for Labour Affairs attempted to provide PPE to platform workers during the pandemic, though these attempts were constrained by platforms’ reluctance to support the provision of PPE. As mentioned before, there are obvious limits to the flexibility of platform work governance and thus to the influence of municipalities, for instance when proposing support measures for workers that rely on non-state actors’ contribution for realisation, such as Milan’s Rider Spot. Moreover, the lack of legislative powers still hinders city governments at exerting any impact on workers’ entitlements to social benefits. Nonetheless, MLG demonstrates the dynamic nature of platform work governance and the scope for action by municipalities.

9.3 Conclusion

Each case served as demonstration of key aspects of platform work governance: San Francisco as case where officials consider app-based work a remedy against the externalities of the local tech sector, Milan as case where the municipality manages conflicting priorities, and Madrid as case where the national administration takes care of the issue. Still, this chapter has demonstrated that a comparison of their differences as well as their “unexpected parallels” (Locke et al., 1995: 338) can inform our understanding of app-based work governance and in turn contribute to theoretical knowledge. By making sense of Table 15 with the various indicators, MLG has offered a lens into the similarities across cases, enlightened the local contexts in which platform work emerges, and emphasised the key role municipalities can play in governing the phenomenon in cities. Therefore, MLG has been shown to both comprehensively capture the specific context of platform work governance in each case and highlight differences between cases.

This research holds a normative component, namely the evaluation and potential recommendation of the three municipal strategies in the face of workers’ ongoing vulnerabilities. Consequently, it now remains to be asked which implications the present study holds for both future policy and future research, and how its results can benefit policymakers and scholars alike. Apart from stressing the study’s contributions to academic knowledge and expressing some final reflections on platform work governance in cities, this constitutes the purpose of the following concluding chapter.

10. Conclusion

The earlier case studies of Madrid and San Francisco clearly demonstrate why platform work governance remains an urgent field of research despite the introduction of landmark legislation. In both cities, the misclassification of platform workers as self-employed, which is considered a main obstacle to mitigating the precarity of workers (Bajwa et al., 2018; Esbenshade et al., 2019), has been seemingly addressed through the ground-breaking formulations of Spain's national Rider Law and California's state-wide Assembly Bill 5 (AB 5). Alas, in both cases, the legislative measures did not create the intended effects for app-based workers' welfare. Unresolved questions remain about workers' entitlement to social benefits. After initially hiring workers via subcontractors to avoid the payment of social security contributions, platform companies have reverted to a self-employed model in Madrid and other Spanish cities by August 2022 (Brave New Europe, 2022). Meanwhile, the successful opposition of major platforms through Proposition 22 has allowed them to continue the use of independent contractors in San Francisco and the rest of California. The balance is skewed towards labour flexibility rather than social protection, and precarity prevails. Despite promising legislative developments, the Madrid and San Francisco governments consequently remain in tension over platform work. Both episodes not only epitomise the relevance of platform work as field of research but also the ongoing challenge of understanding underlying interests and structures in platform governance processes for policymakers and scholars alike. The thesis shed light into these processes by adopting a novel multi-level governance perspective to app-based work. This concluding chapter will outline the thesis' contributions to academic knowledge as well as the important implications for future policy and research.

The chapter is structured in six parts. Section 10.1 will show how the thesis has responded to the three original research questions and in turn developed the study of platform work governance. Section 10.2 will then emphasise the contributions to academic knowledge: concretely, they are of theoretical, methodological, and empirical nature. First, the theoretical contribution consists of the original conceptualisation and application of multi-level governance (MLG) to platform work governance, a novelty in the respective scholarly debate, as well as of MLG's value in revealing the influence of and relationship between several indicators. Second, the methodological contribution relates to the use of a horizon scan to identify noteworthy cases regarding the municipal management of app-based work

around the world. Third, the empirical contribution reflects the generation of new data on the governance of platform work, including during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco through 17 semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis of 14 policy documents. Recommendations for municipal and national policy will be suggested in Section 10.3, with a focus on lessons from the three case studies, while potential limitations of this study – in methodological, spatial, and temporal terms – will be raised and responded to in Section 10.4. Meanwhile, avenues for future research will be outlined in Section 10.5, proposing the application of MLG in diverse urban contexts and highlighting issues that deserve greater scholarly attention. Lastly, Section 10.6 will express some final reflections on the future of platforms, policy, and power in cities – stressing once more the significant position of city governments in said processes, despite constrained competences or contrasting interests of other stakeholders.

10.1 Developing the study of platform work governance

The emergence of the platform economy and its related aspects – among which are platform work and its governance – is relatively recent. Hence, the complex influences behind governmental responses to it partly remained to be uncovered and explained. Above all, an analytical framework was yet to be proposed which could offer researchers the necessary lens to make sense of the different potential influences, and their relationship, on the responses of city governments to the growth of app-based work. Three research questions served to fill the existing knowledge gaps. By answering the questions, this research has developed the study of platform work governance in several ways, as demonstrated in the following paragraphs. Each research question shall now be addressed in turn.

10.1.1 Revealing policy tools for steering platform work in cities

First, against the backdrop of growing platform workers' protests globally (Bessa et al., 2022), it was urgent to explore the possible responses of city governments to platform work. As noted in Chapter 3, previous research has offered some indications as to how municipalities manage platforms and the sharing economy more broadly. For instance, Voytenko Palgan et al. (2021) or Vith et al. (2019) offered categorisations of municipal approaches to the sharing economy, including as regulator, enabler, or collaborator. Yet,

there was greater scope for investigation into the mechanisms and policies through which city officials steer platform work and react to the growing groups of platform workers more specifically. This task seemed particularly pertinent considering the ongoing insecure and often precarious conditions of app-based workers in cities, and the at times insufficient mitigation measures at higher governmental levels. *Prima facie*, data analysis suggested highly diverse responses by the three city governments, some of which had not been previously acknowledged in other cities by the literature. Madrid's case points to an unwillingness to recommend platform work to local jobseekers as well as a reluctance to consult with stakeholders, including workers and platform managers. In contrast, the city government in Milan takes a more proactive and interactive approach: its approach consists of holding regular roundtables with stakeholders, monitoring nation-wide negotiations on changes in the employment status of app-based workers, changing transportation rules, and enforcing health and safety standards to mitigate precarious work conditions. Meanwhile, municipal officials in San Francisco pursue yet another path because they consider platform work as positive outcome for jobseekers and recognise its contribution to the local labour market as important income source.

Despite the differences in managing the issue, the case studies highlight a certain pragmatism, or even creativity, of all respective city governments. The brief discussion sections in the preceding case studies already considered the significance of each response. Madrid's municipal reaction was a simple unwillingness to either lead jobseekers towards platform work or engage with non-state actors, thus limiting the influence of interest groups. Moreover, Milan's interactive approach reflects the city government's difficulties in managing a complex metropolis with limited municipal resources. In San Francisco, the discussion section argued that the municipality's embrace of app-based work suggests an attempt to mitigate the social costs of an unequal yet innovative local economy. One might rightly wonder whether the peculiar nature of abovementioned responses defies traditional definitions of policies or policy instruments. The broad definition of said instruments by Vedung (1998: 21) as "set of techniques by which governmental authorities wield their power [...] to [...] effect or prevent social change" captures a wide range of possible measures, including the ones found here. According to Majoor et al.'s (2015: 114) categorisation of policy instruments used by city governments, the measures taken by the three cases can be characterised as "'softer' less intrusive instruments": *inter alia*, these may include monitoring, endorsement, or the management of actors' access to decision-making

processes compared to “command and control” (ibid.: 114) regulatory measures. The latter, “hard” measures have commonly been the subjects of previous studies on municipal platform governance (Davidson et al., 2016; Brail, 2018; Pilaar, 2018). Hence, the actions adopted by Madrid’s, Milan’s, and San Francisco’s municipalities, though perhaps uncommon, are not atypical policy instruments. That varied nature of the different responses should encourage future studies to pay more attention to many potential mechanisms through which cities can manage the growth of platform work. Such research, in turn, can also inform policy recommendations for other municipalities seeking to steer the phenomenon.

Importantly, this initial research question showed that platform governance and responses to platform work in cities are not necessarily synonymous even if they concern the same platform, as the discussion (Chapter 9) argued. San Francisco, for instance, demonstrates how policymakers of City Hall seek to manage the presence of Uber and similar ride-hailing platforms through a dedicated congestion tax. However, when it comes to responding to the growth of Uber’s local workforce, municipal officials are lenient to act and indeed recognise platform work as positive outcome for unemployed residents. Similarly, in Milan the city government cooperates with certain platforms, such as Airbnb, but deliberately cracks down on violations of health and safety standards concerning delivery platforms to mitigate the vulnerability of respective workers. Artioli (2018) already indicated that differences exist in regulatory responses depending on the sector in which a platform is operating, for example flat sharing, transportation, or delivery. Yet, the finding that differences can even arise within different sections of the *same* platform, as San Francisco shows, takes her insight a step further. It thus was pertinent to investigate the motives behind responses to app-based work specifically, as the second research question set out to do. Investigating the empirical data through multi-level governance revealed the dynamics and constraints that lead municipalities to enact their responses.

10.1.2 Accounting for differences in municipal responses to platform work

Second, this study examined the influences behind municipal responses to platform work. Being more analytical than simply identifying the diverse municipal actions uncovered above, the context of each case had to be enlightened. This objective demanded an analytical framework that could account for a wide range of factors, for instance stakeholders’

influence, institutional constraints, and motivations or policy priorities of municipal officials. Such framework should also allow for replicability across different cases. Operationalised through four original indicators, MLG revealed the relationship between different influences behind each municipal response, capturing a distinct MLG arrangement in each case. These included the influence of non-state actors, the role of various governmental levels and distribution of competences among them, the availability of policy instruments on city level, and policy priorities of the municipal government and officials' willingness to engage in debates surrounding platform work. Each indicator held different values in each case, and the relationship of those indicators allowed to explain the respective municipal responses. As the discussion (Chapter 9) emphasised, the distribution of responsibilities pertaining to app-based work, and officials' openness to engage in related debates on city level emerged as significant factors in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco.

Thus, Madrid's case could be explained by a clear governmental hierarchy, in which the national government is seen as responsible for addressing the vulnerability of platform workers through a nation-wide legal provision; a concern among municipal officials about leading "precarious" jobseekers into "precarious" platform work, in the words of one interview participant; limited competences pertaining to labour or social security law; and limited leeway for workers and platforms to engage with governmental levels and influence the governance of app-based work. Milan's response results from a different MLG arrangement of the four indicators. It stems from the insufficiency of nation-wide consultations to resolve the tensions between workers and platforms; the aspiration of responsible municipal departments to act in the interests of workers, yet also to support Milan's business community; the strong local presence of traditional trade unions representing app-based workers; and competition with other Italian cities over which one would handle the growth of platform work, and the precarity of workers, most effectively. The four indicators again alerted to a distinct MLG arrangement in San Francisco, where the municipal management of platform work is the product of California-wide legislative attempts to classify workers as employees and grant them access to employment-related benefits; the desire of officials in City Hall to attract innovation and business activity; the perceived need to combat poverty and homelessness; and the ability of platforms to use financial capital and political influence in local governance processes.

Moreover, for each of the three cases, the MLG indicators successfully unveiled the respective power constellations and highlighted which groups of actors are able to influence platform work governance within local institutional constraints. Compared to many earlier studies (Beer et al., 2017; Zanatta et al., 2018; Tabascio et al., 2021) on the regulation and governance of platform work in cities – with the exception of Ardura Urquiaga et al. (2019) who hinted at it – the application of MLG pointed to the significant role of the perception of app-based work by municipal officials. Perception, in turn, helped explain officials' willingness or reluctance to engage with the issue – though, once more, such perception can be best explained in tandem with other indicators. For instance, Madrid's case suggests that the city's municipal officials do not consider platform work an urgent policy concern, due to different policy priorities including underemployment and unemployment in the local labour market. Yet, their lack of concern likely also mirrors officials' awareness of the nation-wide law aiming to resolve the misclassification of platform workers, thus taking pressure to intervene off the city government. In contrast, Milan's municipality acts within a highly diverse governance environment, where the lack of a comprehensive national response to platform work and the municipal desire to balance innovation and workers' protection push a left-wing city administration to engage with non-state actors in search for local solutions. Meanwhile, not only does San Francisco's municipality not share concerns about the nature and working conditions of platform work, instead considered by officials as stepping stone, but regards it as remedy for residents to make ends meet amid exorbitant living costs. Section 10.2 will summarise the study's theoretical contributions resulting from above insights.

10.1.3 Explaining the pandemic's consequences on platform work governance

Third, and going a step further, it was yet to be investigated to what extent the Covid-19 pandemic affected those influences and reshaped municipal responses, if at all. The pandemic posed a unique emergency to urban policymakers while shedding light on the vulnerabilities of platform workers. Whether the heightened awareness for the precarious work conditions on platforms resulted in any adaptations of city governments' responses – and if so, caused by which changed influences – became a pressing question. Interestingly, the analysis in the pandemic chapter (Chapter 8) revealed a continuation of previous policy outcomes, due to a reinforcement of municipal priorities in all three cities. First, policy outcomes were not altered by the emergency situation. Madrid's city government did not

abandon its reluctance to recommend platform work to jobseekers, despite an increase in the local unemployment rate, and the municipality in San Francisco continued to embrace app-based work. Milan's city administration decided to put in place support mechanisms for workers and provide PPE to some groups of platform workers, though this was a further outcome of the pre-existing regular roundtable with stakeholders.

Second, municipal priorities were reinforced, which highlighted some of the ambiguous positions held by the city governments in question. Interview participants of Madrid's municipality shared increased concerns about the rise in underemployment and unemployment at the time of the pandemic, prioritising previously already salient issues, while San Francisco's officials saw even more reason to embrace app-based work as income source for jobseekers amid dire economic circumstances. The circumstances hence led to a de-prioritisation of concerns about platform workers' vulnerability in Madrid and San Francisco. Milan's Municipal Councillor for Employment recognised the contribution of platforms to the survival of local restaurants and shops during periods of lockdown – calling them “indispensable” – but at the same time attempted to protect workers from the risks of a coronavirus infection. This ambiguous stance was not new but came to the fore thanks to the exigencies of the pandemic which tested the city government's commitment to protecting the rights of precarious workers in a situation of heightened precarity for those workers.

In a sense, these findings support the insights of RQ 2 on the influences behind municipal responses. First, governmental hierarchies matter: temporary support mechanisms provided by other governmental levels to self-employed and platform workers during the pandemic – even if addressing their vulnerabilities insufficiently – alleviated the pressure on municipalities to act. Second, municipal actors hold greater influence over the governance of platform work than previous research might have suggested, especially with regard to their perception of app-based work as challenge or opportunity and in relation to other policy priorities. The episode of the Covid-19 pandemic shed light on the important role of city officials in deciding whether to intervene in platform work governance or which policy priorities to pursue. In the cases of Milan and San Francisco, the pandemic highlighted the positive contributions of app-based work for both municipalities, which might have discouraged stricter interventions against respective platforms. Next, it will be elaborated how, going beyond the research questions, the present study not only closes knowledge gaps but presents three specific contributions to academic knowledge.

10.2 Three contributions to academic knowledge

In pursuing its objective of answering three research questions, this study expanded the literature on the municipal governance of platform work. Concretely, the contributions of this research to academic knowledge are threefold: theoretical, methodological, and empirical. Table 16 briefly summarises their main elements. In tandem, these contributions represent a significant step forward in understanding and explaining the governance of platform work in urban context.

Table 16: Three types of contributions by the present study to academic knowledge.

Type of contribution	Description
1. Theoretical	Novel operationalisation of multi-level governance via four indicators for the study of platform work governance in cities, and recalibration of earlier theoretical accounts by stressing the relationship of different influences that can explain city governments' responses to the phenomenon
2. Methodological	Use of a horizon scan to identify noteworthy developments in the municipal management of platform work from around the world and to inform the subsequent choice of case studies
3. Empirical	Generation of original data on platform work governance in three cities (Madrid, ES; Milan, IT; and San Francisco, US), the roles and views of stakeholders, and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on municipal responses to app-based work

10.2.1 Theoretical contributions: Demonstrating the value of multi-level governance

This research has approached the study of platform work in cities from a completely different and novel perspective, namely multi-level governance. Crucially, it has done so successfully, offering a conceptualisation and operationalisation that allow to uncover the complex influences behind municipal responses to app-based work in different cities. Earlier studies (Vidal et al., 2018; Vith et al., 2019; Tabascio et al., 2021) already demonstrated the value of applying governance approaches to investigate mechanisms used by municipalities in the platform economy, but the present research has taken their approaches a step further by adopting a multi-level perspective to governance. Both conceptualisation and

operationalisation of MLG have been geared towards understanding why, and not simply how, municipalities manage platform work in distinct ways. First, the conceptualisation of MLG suggested here stresses the need to enlighten the policy priorities of municipal officials as well as their perception of platform work, in addition to MLG's traditional focus on governmental hierarchies and the influence of non-state actors. Thus conceptualised, MLG ensures that city governments and their officials are not treated as passive entities, who merely react to external influences, in the analysis but as active agents pursuing their own goals. Second, its operationalisation via four indicators (1. roles, views, and involvement of non-state actors; 2. relationship between governmental levels regarding platform work; 3. availability of competences and instruments on municipal level; and 4. involvement of the municipality in the policy debate on platform work) focuses the concept's explanatory potential on the possible influences that can shape municipal policy responses.

MLG successfully unveiled the influence of limited municipal competences, non-state actors' interests, and the policy priorities of city officials in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco. The discussion (Chapter 9) highlighted how the distribution of responsibilities regarding platform work among various governmental levels as well as municipalities' perception of app-based work and openness to related debates proved particularly significant influences. In contrast to earlier theoretical accounts of platform governance (Chapter 3), the present analysis has argued that the influences on municipal responses uncovered previously need to be considered in combination. Consequently, this research has not only confirmed Kaufmann's (2020) argument that influences on municipal policies are best examined through MLG, but it has also charted a new theoretical path for insights into the management of platform work by governments. It has shown why such a global phenomenon causes highly diverse reactions on urban level and which role local context plays in shaping governmental responses.

Moreover, the MLG analysis has uncovered the important position municipalities can hold in debates surrounding platform work, despite constraints in relevant legislative competences or opposition by non-state actors. MLG arrangements display flexibility in platform work governance for city governments to pursue municipal policy priorities and make use of soft instruments, even if higher governmental levels address a main elements of workers' precarity, namely their misclassification as self-employed. Since this study has shown the merit of investigating app-based work through multi-level perspective, future

research on governmental regulation or intervention in that sector would be well advised to adopt such perspective as well. Studies on the influences of coalitions, framing, or single political actors on platform work governance could all benefit from a consideration of the multi-level structures in which they take place. Section 10.5 will return to suggestions for future research.

10.2.2 Methodological contributions: A new starting point for studying platform work

This study's methodological contribution consists of its identification of cases on the subject of app-based work. The initial horizon scan of 73 cities from around the world, aiming to uncover interesting case studies regarding their municipal management of platform work, represented a new and systematic starting point in related research. Such scan offered the advantage of identifying cities with novel or unexpected developments in their respective platform work sectors, thus promising insightful results at the end of data collection and analysis, even if it might have posed spatial or geographical limitations to the study's value in other cities, as discussed further below. The horizon scan thus provided a global overview over the current trends and dynamics in urban platform work governance, flagged up the most noteworthy cases, pointed towards useful documentary sources, and ensured that subsequent research stages would produce interesting results that can inform future policy and research. The following paragraphs will demonstrate that such interesting – and original – results have indeed been generated during this study.

10.2.3 Empirical contributions: Original evidence from Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco

The most obvious contribution of this thesis consists of its original empirical findings. Qualitative data collection generated extensive evidence on both form and management of the platform economy in three different locations, Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco. Not only did it enlighten the most recent developments in the respective platform economies, especially with a view to the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on app-based work. Yet, it also produced new data on local policy processes from a range of stakeholders – including policymakers, workers' representatives, and local academic experts – that had not been

interviewed in earlier studies on platform work in the respective cities. Interviews with elite participants or key decision-makers provided particularly rich and privileged insights into governance processes. The three research questions reflect the empirical contributions of this study more concretely.

The purpose of RQ 1 was precisely to produce new evidence by uncovering further responses or policies employed by city governments to steer platform work, and it achieved its aim. By looking into each case's management of the phenomenon, the question identified novel ways of dealing with app-based work on urban level, including the recognition of platform work as positive outcome for jobseekers and thus as important income source, the deliberate enforcement of health and safety measures in support of workers' rights, or the unwillingness to lead unemployed residents into such work. RQ 2 had a stronger analytical component compared to the remaining RQs, still it made an empirical contribution through the data it required concerning the influences behind each respective municipal response. It gathered evidence on the views and roles of diverse local actors in the governance of platform work, some of which constituted elite interview participants (Harvey, 2011) due to their high-ranking positions in respective municipal or regional governments. For instance, one municipal councillor of Milan's municipality provided new insights into their collaboration with platform companies and workers' representatives, while one deputy minister of Madrid's regional government elaborated on the dynamics between different Spanish governmental levels on the issue of app-based work. Moreover, other interview participants gave detailed accounts of their strategies to engage in respective governance processes, providing data that have hitherto not been reported in relevant research. Regarding RQ 3 on the pandemic's consequences, no previous study has asked a comparable question that could have examined and explained the impact of the health emergency on municipal responses to app-based work. This research therefore produced first detailed evidence on the handling of platform work by city governments in emergency situations that should invite other scholars to follow suit and test the findings reported above in diverse circumstances. In addition, the evidence produced here revealed further issues related to platform work that would deserve consideration in future studies, such as the growing challenge of less visible app-based workers, the tensions between allowing innovative platform services and protecting workers' rights in cities, or the prioritisation of platform work compared to other policy issues by city governments. Section 10.5 will return to implications for future research.

10.3 Implications for municipal and national policy

By its very nature as policy analysis, this research provides insights into the characteristics and effects of policies. Thus, if a municipality aims to support local app-based workers and contribute to the mitigation of their precarity, important lessons can be drawn from Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco. Each case represented a distinct response to platform work, emanating from a combination of local influences, as the application of multi-level governance was able to reveal. The respective discussion sections gave some consideration to the feasibility and drawbacks of those municipal responses, but they remain to be evaluated and, if promising, recommended here. In specific circumstances, each response has its merits and attractions, though some contextualisation is required in all three cases to enlighten their applicability in other cities, following Locke et al.'s (1995) argument for contextualised comparisons. First, the path taken by the city government in Madrid – the mere decisions not to lead jobseekers towards platform work and not to engage in debates surrounding the issue – appeals due to its simplicity. Yet, the response only offers limited potential for replication elsewhere since work conditions and social protection of platform workers are left in the hands of Spain's national government: the Rider Law compensates for the lack of support mechanisms on urban level. Therefore, other city governments should be aware that refusing to engage with the issue or ignoring it risks exacerbating workers' precarity, when safety nets provided to app-based workers by other governmental authorities are absent.

Second, the approach of San Francisco's municipality – recognising such work as positive outcome for jobseekers – might appeal to city governments battling high unemployment or seeking to create jobs for less qualified residents. However, similar to Madrid's case, the need for additional support mechanisms for workers is crucial: on its own, the response does not address irregular pay, lack of health insurance, or other elements of precarity. Replicating San Francisco's approach elsewhere could produce welcome outcomes for workers in combination with some kind of social safety net, for instance the entitlements promised by AB 5, hence allowing workers to engage on platforms while being shielded from related risks. Indeed, it could be worth investigating under which circumstances the promotion of platform work in combination with city-level social benefits fulfils the municipal objectives of reducing unemployment and poverty.

Third, the Milan model is the most resource-intensive of the three approaches but yields the most promising results. Its regular roundtable allows workers' representatives to voice their concerns and capture the attention of municipal officials, which has resulted most notably in changes in transportation rules, enforcement of health and safety standards, and proposals for a Riders Spot. An important element of Milan's approach hence consists of the strong presence of unions and platform collectives who alert the municipality to the challenges faced by workers. Such effective and well-organised representation cannot always be taken for granted, and other municipalities might spend greater efforts on enabling participation and representation of workers in consultations. In all, the statement that Milan's municipal response is not perfect will appear obvious, considering how the legal classification of workers remains unaffected and workers lament that the city government could take more decisive action in their favour, the case study (Chapter 6) showed. Still, Milan crucially demonstrates the leeway of municipalities in responding to the needs of app-based workers. The interactive approach involving various stakeholders renders municipal governance more challenging and complex, yet the outcome responds to workers' needs more comprehensively compared to the other cases.

One particular challenge to which the three cases have alerted, and which Milan's approach has not been able to address effectively either, is the growth of less visible platform workers providing domestic services. Their situation can be just as precarious as that of more visible forms of app-based workers, for example couriers or drivers, but the nature of their domestic activities hinders their representation as well as the public awareness of their conditions. Policymakers on municipal and higher governmental levels should assign heightened importance to their risks and vulnerabilities. Relatedly, there continues to be a need for more comprehensive data on size and composition of local groups of platform workers. Effective policy requires a comprehensive evidence base (Sanderson, 2002: 3), which has been difficult to provide considering the flexible and informal nature of platform work. Different platform services attract different demographic groups and genders: Milan's case unveiled how Uber drivers are predominantly Italian citizens due to the required driving licence, while Deliveroo or Glovo riders are composed of more diverse nationalities. Consequently, certain groups might have received disproportionately more attention by policymakers in governance processes, potentially discriminating against others or perpetuating inequalities in local labour markets. The need for more comprehensive data constitutes an urgent

endeavour for future research as well, if it seeks to paint a more nuanced picture of which app-based workers have influenced, and benefitted from, municipal policies.

Going further, national or higher governmental authorities can learn additional policy lessons from the insights of this research. As comprehensive legislative measures have hitherto failed to grant labour protections to platform workers in the three cases and are yet to be proposed in other countries, universal provisions irrespective of employment status could alleviate some of workers' vulnerabilities. Proposals surrounding a universal basic income (Weber, 2017) granting every worker a monthly unconditional income, or universal basic services (Gough, 2019) providing free access to essential public services including healthcare and housing, present innovative ideas that could support app-based workers. In some countries including the UK, universal healthcare has been shown to benefit platform workers and reduce their precarity (Petropoulos et al., 2019). Such provisions could prove particularly useful for less visible platform workers who often struggle to be heard in discussions on the platform economy, missing out on support mechanisms targeted at better represented app-based workers. The Covid-19 pandemic equally underlined the exacerbated health risks to workers due to both their need to make a living and the lack of support mechanisms, be they of financial nature or otherwise (Benner et al., 2020).

Municipal policymakers thus are called upon to react to continuing vulnerabilities of platform workers: Milan's case offers a guide to the potential measures that can be instituted to do so. Crucially, the diverse municipal responses should remind policymakers that there are no limits to the creativity or pragmatism of approaches city governments may take, especially concerning "soft" policy instruments. In fact, the constraints of available competences, limited resources, and competing interests municipalities need to reconcile might make creative responses all the more important and worthwhile.

10.4 Limitations of the research

Constrained resources and the thoroughness or in-depth analysis required by qualitative case studies set limits to any kind of research project with comparable aims and methods. According to Felix et al. (2019: 166), a study's limitations consist of the challenges

encountered by a researcher during the diverse stages of a research project. In addition, limitations can also stem from the methodological choices a researcher takes. In the present case, potential limitations become visible in methodological, spatial, and temporal terms: while spatial and temporal limitations are also methodological, here they are treated separately for better understanding. The next paragraphs will show how I mitigated these challenges, or limitations.

10.4.1 Methodological limitations: Collecting data during the Covid-19 pandemic

Methodological limitations were already discussed at length in Chapter 4, where the research methods' reliability and validity were defended. Case studies and qualitative research methods pose potential shortcomings that require consideration and mitigation. Here, it should only be reiterated that I took every care to minimise the impact of methodological challenges, above all the difficulties related to the global Covid-19 pandemic, during which crucial parts of this study were conducted. The recruitment of interview participants constituted the most noteworthy challenge in that regard. Many interview candidates were unable to participate, most likely due to the personal and professional tolls the pandemic exacted from everyone. At the same time, all representatives of platform companies contacted during the recruitment stage were reluctant to take part in interviews on the regulation of app-based work; interview requests were either turned down or remained unanswered in all three cases.

Nonetheless, appropriate mitigation measures compensated for candidates' inability or unwillingness to provide information. First, documentary evidence substituted for some interviews and supported triangulation of findings from diverse sources, for example from other interviews, position papers of platform companies, or municipal policy documents. Second, the 19 interview participants were well placed in the respective governance processes or had sufficient insights to convey detailed and rich accounts of the local platform work characteristics, the municipal management thereof, as well as of the tensions or interactions between diverse interest groups. The elite interviewees provided particularly valuable, and otherwise difficult to obtain, material which compensated for the absence of other potential participants. Data saturation, or the sufficiency of available original data to achieve the research aim without reservation, became visible in the process of answering the

three RQs, which presented no difficulty. Therefore, the methodological limitations do not put into doubt the robustness of abovementioned research findings and their contributions to the literature.

10.4.2 Spatial limitations: Learning from ‘global cities’

The spatial, in the sense of geographical, choices of this study raise questions about the findings’ applicability in other contexts. Conducting case studies in Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco presents obvious benefits as well as limitations. While the methodology chapter outlined the advantages of analysing these three cities, above all data availability or “information richness” (Meyer, 2001: 333) in addition to noteworthy local developments in the respective platform economies which the horizon scan aimed to uncover, questions regarding their choice remain. All three cities are considered “global cities” according to the classification by Taylor (Hudson, 2012: 458) due to their contributions to the globalised world through their roles as hubs of innovation, knowledge exchange, and economic growth. As such, their municipalities might experience certain dynamics more strongly, for instance the tensions between “political and economic power” (Hudson, 2012: 462) concentrated there, which distinguishes them from other urban conglomerates. The presence of platforms – the most prominent of which first rolled out in San Francisco and other global cities (Walker, 2018) – reflects those tensions and their need to be managed by municipalities in global cities first.

The cases’ categorisation as global cities thus leads to the – perhaps obvious but no less relevant – question of what the three case studies can tell us about the governance of platform work in other cities, particularly those that might have little in common with the economic development of Madrid, Milan, and San Francisco. For instance, handling of platform work and its perception by municipalities in cities with larger informal economies, fewer platform workers, less developed digital infrastructure, or in those considered “ordinary” or “second-tier” cities (Bramwell, 2020: 15) might vary considerably. Some cities in the Global South might be obvious contenders to challenging the findings presented here, particularly cities in non-democratic countries where governmental hierarchies and the involvement of non-state actors could be expected to take very different shapes compared to the three cases. The methods chapter (Chapter 4) already hinted at the limited generalisability or external validity

of the results – due to the restricted geographical focus – as common feature of qualitative research. Put differently, the findings in the three cities are not geared towards suggesting parallels between the governance dynamics in Madrid, Milan and San Francisco and how other cities steer platform work. However, most importantly, the value of the analytical framework provided by multi-level governance is not diminished by the geographical choices of this study. Its four indicators can enlighten various potential influences of municipal responses to app-based work in other cities as well. Still, in order to prove the MLG framework’s value, it might be worthwhile considering its validity in cities that share few commonalities with the “global cities” characteristics Taylor has assigned to the cases analysed here. Future research could probe the boundaries of the framework’s applicability in diverse urban contexts, above all economically and politically but also in terms of openness to innovation.

10.4.3 Temporal limitations: Conducting research on different time periods

Finally, it needs to be asked to what extent the timing of this study presents a limitation to its relevance and validity. The platform economy is in constant flux, as legal frameworks, platforms’ business models, and consumer preferences influence and, in the case of the former two, seek to adjust to each other. Therefore, examining a component of such dynamic target, namely platform work, could affect the long-term validity of the snapshot this study has sought to capture. I conducted data collection from mid-2020 to mid-2021, thus during a crucial period for platform work in all three cases. Apart from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, each city experienced important developments at that time: Madrid saw the introduction of the national Rider Law, Milan faced intensifying protests of local platform workers, and San Francisco experienced unusually high unemployment rates.

Although the timing of this research does not invalidate the findings it generated, it needs to be remembered that a repetition of the research at a different point in time might yield different findings in the three cities. This could be particularly true in response to RQs 1 and 2 asking about municipal responses to platform work and the influences behind them. RQ 3 demanded a specific temporal focus on the early stages of the pandemic in the first half of 2020, therefore repeating the analysis should not produce different results. Concerning the first two RQs, there could be some insight in conducting a longitudinal study and tracking

changes in the municipal management of app-based work over time. Still, the value of MLG should not be affected by the timing of the research: its four analytical criteria are not time sensitive but alert to different interplays of four indicators independently of the point in time one chooses to study. In fact, RQ 3 highlighted the value of MLG even when applied to a different period, namely the pandemic.

Another consideration should be given to the handling of data sources with regard to different time periods. RQs 1 and 2 on one hand, and RQ 3 on the other, asked about different periods: the former two focused on the pre-pandemic period prior to 2020, whereas the latter dealt with developments in early 2020. Distinguishing between these periods to competently answer the research questions did not represent a major challenge, however. Documentary evidence could be filtered according to publication dates and by references to the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, I specifically asked interview participants about the impact of the pandemic on local platform workers and subsequent municipal responses to enable the distinction between participants' views and insights at different times. In sum, limitations can be observed in this study due to the narrow geographical and temporal focus it adopts, yet they do not invalidate the relevant findings and contributions outlined earlier. The value of the analytical framework appears particularly robust for the study of platform work governance at various times and in various cities.

10.5 An agenda for future research

The preceding sections already suggested that findings and limitations of this study offer springboards for several avenues of future research. On one hand, the findings unveiled aspects and themes in the three cities that would merit more thorough analysis. For example, the priority assigned by municipal officials to platform work and the struggles of workers relative to other policy issues, or the potential of app-based work to fulfil diverse policy objectives, appeared to play an important role in the willingness of city governments to engage in related debates. Above all, the trade-off between fostering innovation and protecting workers' rights emerged as significant influences on municipal responses in Milan and San Francisco, while its absence in the case of Madrid raises interesting questions about the geographical or ideological limits of that trade-off as well. Such investigation could lead to the subsequent question whether the presence of that trade-off results in novel

policy mechanisms and responses by city governments to balance the objectives of allowing platform work as reflection of innovation while protecting workers.

On the other hand, the methodological limitations invite further investigation in several regards. For instance, it could be useful to probe the explanatory potential of the multi-level governance framework in different locations. Asking how well MLG accounts for municipal policies on app-based work in cities within authoritarian, or so-called competitive authoritarian states (Levitsky et al., 2002) – where pro forma democratic institutions do not translate into democratic, participatory decision-making – would achieve two goals contemporaneously. Not only would it strengthen the framework by questioning the influence of non-state actors and governmental hierarchies on platform governance in authoritarian settings. It would also make crucial contributions to a scholarly debate which has been predominantly concerned with cities in democratic or developed countries, especially North America and Western Europe, as Artioli (2018: 25) stressed. Similarly, one should pay greater attention to how municipalities of “second-tier” cities (Bramwell, 2020: 15) steer app-based work, and why they do so in specific ways. Those municipalities might face very diverse circumstances compared to the three present cases, for example in terms of available resources or regarding their influence within national governmental hierarchies, leading them to resort to different responses than those identified here or in the literature.

A further avenue for future studies consists of adopting a different time frame: conducting longitudinal research could enlighten why the management of platform work by municipalities changes over time, examining the shifting composition of the diverse MLG indicators. Yet, capturing such increased complexity might require greater resources or a more limited number of cases to be feasible. Another future line of inquiry could respond to the difficulty of obtaining data from platform companies discussed in Chapter 4. Emphasising their positions vis-à-vis city governments could generate a more nuanced reflection of the aims and roles of platforms in multi-layer governance processes, especially on the formal and informal mechanisms through which platform managers coordinate and distil their global, regional, national, and local interests into municipal governance. Overall, this study lays out several directions that future research could pursue to broaden the empirical and theoretical foundations of platform work governance.

10.6 Final reflections on platforms, policy, and power in cities

Studying platform work in cities through a political science perspective, and more precisely through a focus on governance, has revealed the crucial role of cities and city governments in shaping the work conditions of platform workers. Cities – broadly, even physically conceived – play a major part in fuelling app-based work and creating the tensions inherent to platforms. They offer the digital infrastructure, customer base, and workforce which form the bedrock of platforms’ ability to expand. However, cities can also contribute to the resolution of these tensions: physically by making platform workers and their vulnerabilities visible in urban spaces, and politically by putting support mechanisms of city governments for workers in place. This thesis has shown that the potential of municipal officials to mitigate the precarity of app-based workers exists despite constrained competences in relevant policy areas, above all labour and social security law, and at times competing interests of non-state or even state actors.

Yet, it has also shown that municipalities do not necessarily use that potential to manage platform work – either because they believe that other governmental levels address the issue more comprehensively (as in Madrid’s case), due to a desire to promote economic activity and innovation (as in Milan), or because app-based work is considered a remedy against poverty and unemployment (as in San Francisco). Additionally, reports about platforms’ aggressive lobbying efforts on various governmental levels, including the recent revelations in the so-called Uber Files about digital labour platform Uber’s attempts to gain access to heads of government (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, 2022), might reinforce the impression of platforms’ extensive global influence that single city governments cannot manage. However, the present research has demonstrated that, to a certain extent, they can.

As the digitalisation of work advances and the global trend towards the “platformization” (Anttiroiko, 2016: 3) of service sectors materialises in urban environments, city governments continue to have a stake in the governance of platform work: they do so even if the globalised nature of digital dynamics and platforms’ aspirations to subvert municipal regulatory authority (Wolf, 2022) suggest otherwise. The power to improve conditions of platform workers and counter the growth of precarious workforces in the digital economy partly lies

in the hands of municipal officials, and that power is for city governments to grasp and defend. This insight constitutes the most significant and urgent conclusion from the present research.

Appendices

Appendix A: Horizon scan and case selection

Appendix Table 1: List of cities considered during the horizon scan.

City	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
Aarhus	✓				
Albuquerque	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Amman	✓				
Amsterdam	✓				
Auckland	✓				
Aveiro	✓				
Bahir Dah	✓				
Balanga	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Barcelona	✓				
Beijing	✓				
Bilbao	✓				
Birmingham	✓				
Boston	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Buenos Aires	✓				
Chicago	✓				
Chongqing	✓				
Cluj-Napoca	✓				
Copenhagen	✓				
Cork	✓				
Cuenca	✓				
Dubai	✓				
Dublin	✓				
Düsseldorf	✓				
Eindhoven	✓	✓	✓		
Espoo	✓				
Geneva	✓				
Ghent	✓				
Gothenburg	✓				
Gwangju	✓				
Helsinki	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Kobe	✓				
Lansing	✓				
London	✓				
Los Angeles	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Madrid	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Malang	✓	✓			
Maribor	✓				
Melton	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mexico City	✓				

Milan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minneapolis	✓	✓	✓		
Moscow	✓				
Nairobi	✓				
Namyangju	✓				
Oslo	✓				
Paris	✓				
Pozzuoli	✓				
Richmond	✓	✓	✓		
Rio de Janeiro	✓	✓			
Rotterdam	✓	✓	✓	✓	
San Francisco	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
San Sebastian	✓				
Sao Paulo	✓				
Seattle	✓				
Seoul	✓				
Shanghai	✓				
Shenzhen	✓				
Singapore	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Sorocaba	✓				
St Albert	✓				
Stockholm	✓				
Swansea	✓				
Tacoma	✓				
Taipei City	✓				
Toronto	✓				
Toulouse	✓	✓	✓		
Umea	✓				
Valencia	✓				
Vantaa	✓	✓	✓		
Vienna	✓				
Vitoria-Gasteiz	✓				
Ybycui	✓				
Zurich	✓				

Appendix Table 2: List of sources used in the horizon scan.

Name of source	Author/Publisher	Year of publication	Content/focus of source	Cities used in the scan ¹
Jobs and Skills in the Local Economy	Urban Innovative Actions	2020	Case studies of employment and skills training initiatives	Cluj-Napoca, Madrid, Aveiro, Vantaa, Eindhoven, Pozzuoli, Rotterdam, Cuentá
An Overview of Public Policies of the Sharing Economy by Cities	Sharing Cities Action	2019	Case studies of reaction to platform companies by city governments	Toronto, Milan, Buenos Aires, Ghent, Umea, Kobe, Stockholm, Maribor, Seoul, Gothenburg, Vitoria-Gasteiz
New urban economies	URBACT	2015	Urban initiatives for economic development	San Sebastian, Dublin, Toulouse
Agile Cities: Preparing for the Fourth Industrial Revolution	World Economic Forum	2018a	Urban examples of agile education in times of digitalisation	Moscow, Dubai, Aarhus, Amsterdam
Unlocking the Potential of Urban Communities	UNESCO	2015	Case studies of initiatives in twelve Learning Cities	Melton, Sorocaba, Beijing, Bahir Dah, Espoo, Cork, Amman, Mexico City, Ybycui, Balanga, Namyangju, Swansea
Innovation and the City	New York University (NYU) Center for an Urban Future	2016	Case studies of successfully implemented urban innovation	Malang, Seattle, Barcelona, Los Angeles, Nairobi, Tacoma, Sao Paolo, San Francisco, Lansing, Valencia, Albuquerque, Gwangju
Assessing the Future of Our Work: Automation and the Role of Cities	National League of Cities	2018	City profiles with diverse workforce development programmes in times of digitalisation	Boston, Richmond, Minneapolis
Urban E-Health Project in Rio	New Cities Foundation	2013	Urban innovation in healthcare and welfare	Rio de Janeiro
Smart City Strategy Index	Roland Berger Consulting	2019	Ranking based on twelve criteria, including innovation support and digital skills	Vienna, London, St Albert, Chicago, Shanghai, Birmingham, Chongqing, Shenzhen, Paris
Smart City Index	IMD	2019	Ranking based on perceptions of municipal innovations by citizens, including employment policies	Singapore, Oslo, Zurich, Geneva, Copenhagen, Auckland, Taipei City, Helsinki, Bilbao, Düsseldorf

¹ If a city was named in several different sources, it is mentioned only once in this list.

Appendix B: Technical details of documentary analysis

Appendix Table 3: List of documents considered for documentary analysis.

Number	City	Title²	Publisher/Author	Year of publication	Selected for analysis
1	Madrid	Economic Situation and Perspectives of the City of Madrid	Ayuntamiento de Madrid (City Council)	2020	Yes
2	Madrid	Madrid Employment Strategy: Active Labour-Market Policies 2018-2019	Comunidad de Madrid (Metropolitan Region)	2017	Yes
3	Madrid	Madrid Employment Strategy: Innovation Plan for the Network of Public Employment Offices of the Community of Madrid	Comunidad de Madrid	2016	No
4	Madrid	Social Economy and Solidarity Strategy of the Madrid City Council 2018-2025	Ayuntamiento de Madrid	2017	Yes
5	Madrid	Madrid economy 2020: socio-economic analysis	Ayuntamiento de Madrid	2020	No
6	Madrid	Employment Barometre of the City of Madrid	Ayuntamiento de Madrid	2013	No

² In English translation where applicable.

7	Madrid	Activity Report 2018	Ayuntamiento de Madrid	2018	No
8	Madrid	MARES project journal	UIA (research institute)	2017	Yes
9	Milan	Suburban Revolution: Peripheries in the Centre	Comune di Milano (City Council)	2014	Yes
10	Milan	Milan Sharing City: Between Society and Market	Comune di Milano	2015	Yes
11	Milan	Innovation and Inclusion: Milan's periphery as a laboratory for social and economic innovation	Comune di Milano	2018	Yes
12	Milan	Milan White Paper on Social Innovation	Comune di Milano	2016	Yes
13	Milan	Case study: Milan	Comune di Milano	2014	Yes
14	Milan	Urban Capital: Economy and Social Innovation for the City's Benefit	Comune di Milano	2016	No
15	San Francisco	Strategic Plan: Fiscal Year 2019-2020	OEWD (City of San Francisco)	2019	Yes
16	San Francisco	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: San Francisco Local Plan 2017-2020	OEWD (City of San Francisco)	2017	Yes
17	San Francisco	Workforce Strategic	OEWD (City of San Francisco)	2013	Yes

		Plan: 2013-2017			
18	San Francisco	The Gig Economy in San Francisco: Prevalence, Growth, and Implications	OEA (City of San Francisco)	2016	Yes
19	San Francisco	Future of the Workforce Development Ecosystem	OEWD, IFTF (think thank)	2015	Yes
20	San Francisco	Economic Strategy 2014 Update	OEWD (City of San Francisco)	2014	No

NVivo codebook resulting from documentary analysis

Name of code	Description
Actors	Parties involved in the choice or implementation of municipal responses
Businesses	Local companies and employers
Local community	Groups of citizens or neighbourhoods
Municipal government	Public officials and entities within the municipal administration
Other government	National or regional governments and respective entities
Thinktanks	Private research institutes
Third parties	Other actors or entities (including platform companies)
Workers' representatives	Organisations representing certain professional sectors or groups of workers (including platform workers)
Aims	Policy objectives: what ought to be achieved or changed according to the municipal government
Create employment	Encourage job creation
Ensure welfare	Ensure services and contributions traditionally provided by stable employment
Equality	Promote different kinds of equality, such as income or gender equality
Quality work	Promote the creation of quality work
Support living standards	Ensure a stable and sufficient income
Support neighbourhoods	Target policies to respond to challenges in certain neighbourhoods within a city
Upskilling	Providing the population with the skills required by the labour market
Challenges	Motivations and reasons for implementing or proposing a policy: enlightens how the challenge of precarious work has been framed in the specific document
Financing welfare	The challenge of financing the welfare state faced with decreasing social security contributions
Lack of benefits	A growing number of the population lacking access to healthcare, unemployment insurance, sick leave, etc.
Lack of skills	Mismatch between a population's skillset and the skills required by the labour market

Polarised labour market	Rising growth of high-paid and low-paid jobs with a hollowing out of the middle classes as result of the digitalisation of work
Technological disruption	Impact of technology on the nature of work and welfare
Underemployment	Voluntary or involuntary part-time or short-duration work among the urban population
Unemployment	References to different types of unemployment among the urban population
Economic indices	Indicators for the economic performance of a city
Educational attainment	References to the level of education among the urban population
GDP	Level of Gross Domestic Product in the city
Specialisation	Prevalent or growing economic sectors in the city
Other indices	Other quantitative references to the state of the urban economy or labour market (including size of the platform economy)
Responses	Actions taken by the municipal government to respond to precarious work and platform work
Policy tools	Instruments employed by the municipal government, following Mercier et al.'s (2016) classification
Informative	Emphasis on conducting research or studies on the presence of precarious work in a city
Interactive	A bottom-up approach stressing the role of stakeholder engagement, consultation with third parties, and financial incentives
Proactive	A top-down or coercive approach, often in connection with regulation or the creation of specialised departments
Self-regulative	A free-market approach with little or no intervention

Matrix coding queries of policy documents in NVivo

ACTORS	A : Businesses	B : Local community	C : Municipal government	D : Other government	E : Thinktanks	F : Third parties	G : Workers representatives
1 : Madrid	0	0	7	1	0	1	0
2 : Milan	2	1	5	3	2	4	1
3 : San Francisco	1	0	2	1	0	1	0

AIMS	A : Create employment	B : Ensure welfare	C : Equality	D : Quality work	E : Support living standards	F : Support neighbourhoods	G : Upskilling
1 : Madrid	2	2	1	2	1	1	2
2 : Milan	4	2	0	0	0	3	0
3 : San Francisco	1	1	2	2	5	1	4

CHALLENGES	A : Financing welfare	B : Lack of benefits	C : Lack of skills	D : Polarised labour market	E : Technological disruption	F : Underemployment	G : Unemployment
1 : Madrid	0	2	0	0	0	1	1
2 : Milan	1	1	3	0	1	0	1
3 : San Francisco	0	2	0	3	0	4	0

RESPONSES	A : Informative	B : Interactive	C : Proactive	D : Self-regulative
1 : Madrid	0	5	1	0
2 : Milan	1	7	2	0
3 : San Francisco	2	2	2	0

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, and Privacy Notice



College of Social
Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

Study title: The Future of Welfare in the Post-Work Smart City³

Researcher details: Mr. Maximilian Kriz, MA (Hons), MAIS
Maximilian.Kriz@glasgow.ac.uk,

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to take part in a research study.

Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take some time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

1. This study aims to explore how cities have dealt with new forms of work, such as Uber drivers or delivery riders. These forms of work are often insecure, precarious and offer little social protection (e.g. healthcare) to the workers.
2. The research wants to find out how cities can contribute to the welfare of these workers through specific policies.
3. By examining the case studies of Milan, Madrid and San Francisco, it aims to understand and learn from innovative policies in these three cities.
4. Ultimately, the study seeks to propose policy solutions for precarious workers in other cities.

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for participants in the research project, it is hoped that this work can help design policies which meet the needs of precarious workers and contribute to their social protection in cities.

³ Please note that while the research title changed over the course of data collection and analysis, research aims and questions remained the same.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION

You have been asked to participate due to your insights into policymaking and the local policy context of Milan/Madrid/San Francisco. Your participation will involve an **interview of 45-60 minutes** in English. The interview/focus group will be **conducted remotely** via Zoom or Skype, whichever you prefer.

Questions will cover themes ranging from the role of interest groups, the challenge of precarious work in the city, the effect of platforms (e.g. Uber, Deliveroo), the priorities of city leaders and the welfare of workers. The study is not designed to discuss any sensitive topics or distressing material.

Participation is entirely **voluntary** and you have a right to **withdraw** at any time and **without providing a reason**. You don't have to answer a question if you don't want to. In the **event of withdrawal** during the interview, all personal data as well as the recording and transcript or notes of the interview will be deleted. The data generated thus far will be excluded from the further steps of the research process.

PERSONAL DATA

If you agree, your answers will be **audio-recorded and then written down** exactly as spoken on paper. Excerpts and information from the transcripts will then be used in a doctoral thesis and in potential publications as academic journal articles or conference papers.

Data will be kept **secure at all times**, stored in password-protected and encrypted electronic files on the University's servers and on external storage but not shared. Audio-recordings of the interview will be deleted after completion of the project. Anonymised transcripts of the interview will be **stored in a repository** for a duration of ten years in line with the University's Research Guidelines.

Your name and job title or references to your employer will **not be used** in any of the publications and outputs arising from the research **unless you agree to it**. If you do not wish to be identified, specific job titles will be replaced by generic occupational categories and/or policy domains.

Please note that confidentiality may be **limited and conditional** – and the researcher has a duty of care to report to the relevant authorities possible harm/danger to participant or others.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Funding source: University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences PhD Studentship

Supervisor details: Professor Sharon Wright
Sharon.wright@glasgow.ac.uk, +44 141 330 3782

Professor Simon Joss
Simon.joss@glasgow.ac.uk, +44 141 330 5618

This project has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences. To pursue **any complaint about the conduct** of the research: contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk.



College of Social
Sciences

Consent Form

Title of Project: The Future of Welfare in the Post-Work Smart City

Name of Researcher: Maximilian Kriz

Names of Supervisors: Prof. Sharon Wright, Prof. Simon Joss

In giving my consent I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
- I understand that the material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- I understand that the material may be used in future publications, both print and online.
- I understand that other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.
- I consent to the interview/focus group being audio-recorded.
- I understand that audio recordings will be destroyed once the project is complete, and that transcripts will be stored in a repository for the duration of ten years.
- I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

➤ I **agree** to take part in this research study

I **do not agree** to take part in this research study

➤ I **consent / do not consent** (*delete as applicable*) to being identified in the research project.

Name of Participant

Name of Researcher

Signature

Signature

Date

Date

Privacy Notice for Participation in Research Project: The Future of Welfare in the Post-Work Smart City, conducted by Maximilian Kriz

Your Personal Data

The University of Glasgow will be what's known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to your participation in the research project 'The Future of Welfare in the Post-Work Smart City'. This privacy notice will explain how The University of Glasgow will process your personal data.

Why we need it

We are collecting basic personal data such as your name and contact details in order to conduct our research. We need your name and contact details to arrange interviews/focus groups or potentially follow up on the data you have provided.

We only collect data that we need for the research project and, if you indicate on the accompanying Consent Form that you wish so, de-identify your personal data from the research data (such as your answers given during the interview) through pseudonymisation.

Please note that **complete anonymity might be impossible to guarantee** due to the specific geographical locations of the research project and the professional roles of those targeted for participation.

Legal basis for processing your data

We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. As this processing is for Academic Research we will be relying upon **Task in the Public Interest** in order to process the basic personal data that you provide. For any special categories data collected we will be processing this on the basis that it is **necessary for archiving purposes, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes**.

Alongside this, in order to fulfil our ethical obligations, we will ask for your **Consent** to take part in the study. Please see accompanying **Consent Form**.

What we do with it and who we share it with

All the personal data you submit is processed by the postgraduate research student named at the top of this page. In addition, security measures are in place to ensure that your personal data remains safe, including pseudonymisation, secure storage as well as encryption of files and devices. Please consult the **Consent form** and **Participant Information Sheet** which accompany this notice.

We will provide you with a copy of the study findings and details of any subsequent publications or outputs on request.

Due to the nature of this research it is likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way.

What are your rights?

GDPR provides that individuals have certain rights including: to request access to, copies of and rectification or erasure of personal data and to object to processing. In addition, data subjects may also have the right to restrict the processing of the personal data and to data portability. You can request access to the information we process about you at any time.

If at any point you believe that the information we process relating to you is incorrect, you can request to see this information and may in some instances request to have it restricted, corrected, or erased. You may also have the right to object to the processing of data and the right to data portability.

Please note that as we are processing your personal data for research purposes, the ability to exercise these rights may vary as there are potentially applicable research exemptions under the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information on these exemptions, please see [UofG Research with personal and special categories of data](#).

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the [webform](#) or contact dp@gla.ac.uk

Complaints

If you wish to raise a complaint on how we have handled your personal data, you can contact the University Data Protection Officer who will investigate the matter. Our Data Protection Officer can be contacted at dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) <https://ico.org.uk/>

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee or relevant School Ethics Forum in the College.

How long do we keep it for?

Your **personal** data will be retained by the University only for as long as is necessary for processing and no longer than the period of ethical approval (ending on 31/8/2022). After this time, personal data will be securely deleted.

Your **research** data will be retained for a period of ten years in line with the University of Glasgow Guidelines. Specific details in relation to research data storage are provided on the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which accompany this notice.

End of Privacy Notice

Appendix D: Interviews, interview participants, and questions

Appendix Table 4: List of interviews, interview rounds, and participants.

Case	Number	Round	Date	Role
Madrid	I-6	1	22.02.2021	Associate Professor
Madrid	I-7	1	23.02.2021	Researcher
Madrid	I-8	1	01.03.2021	Assistant Professor
Madrid	I-13	2	07.05.2021	Deputy Minister for Employment, Madrid Regional Government
Madrid	I-17	2	21.05.2021	2 Officials of Employment Agency of Madrid
Milan	I-1	1	11.01.2021	Assistant Professor
Milan	I-3	1	29.01.2021	Researcher
Milan	I-5	1	05.02.2021	Associate Professor
Milan	I-11	2	26.04.2021	Workers' Representative (Head of ACTA)
Milan	I-12	2	05.05.2021	Municipal Councillor
Milan	I-14	2	13.05.2021	Head of Milan's Labour Market Observatory
Milan	I-16	2	20.05.2021	2 Workers' Representatives
San Francisco	I-2	1	15.01.2021	Assistant Professor
San Francisco	I-4	1	01.02.2021	Assistant Professor
San Francisco	I-9	2	30.03.2021	Chief Economist of the City of San Francisco
San Francisco	I-10	2	23.04.2021	Workforce Specialist, city-level
San Francisco	I-15	2	14.05.2021	Workforce Specialist, California State-level

Appendix Table 5: List of individuals contacted during recruitment who declined to participate or did not respond.

Case	Date of first email	Position of potential participant	Response
Madrid	16.4.2021	Official, Office for Education, Training and Employment, Madrid city government	No response
Madrid	18.3.2021	Official, Office of Economic Analysis, Madrid regional government	No response
Madrid	18.6.2021	Platform representative, APS	No response
Madrid	18.6.2021	Policy manager, Adigital	No response
Madrid	17.6.2021	Policy manager, Glovo	Declined to participate
Madrid	11.3.2021	Workers' representative	Declined to participate, suggested another participant
Madrid	17.3.2021	Workers' representative, AsoRiders Spain	No response
Madrid	12.3.2021	Workers' representative, Riders Por Derechos	No response
Madrid	12.3.2021	Union representative, Comisiones Obreras	No response
Madrid	10.12.2020	Researcher on Spanish platform economy, Universidad Autonoma de Madrid	No response
Madrid	10.12.2020	Researcher at research institute FEDEA	Declined to participate, suggested another participant
Madrid	9.2.2021	Researcher on platform work and labour law	No response
Madrid	13.3.2021	Union representative, CSIF	No response
Madrid	28.1.2021	Researcher on Madrid's economy	No response
Milan	19.6.2021	Representative, Just Eat Takeaway	No response
Milan	17.6.2021	Representative, Helpling	No response
Milan	19.6.2021	Policy manager, Deliveroo	No response

Milan	2.3.2021	Official, Directorate for Urban Economy and Employment, Milan city government	No response
Milan	28.2.2021	Workers' representative, San Precario	No response
Milan	12.3.2021	Workers' representative, Deliverance Milano	No response
Milan	1.3.2021	Workers' representative, Riders for Rights Milano	No response
Milan	29.3.2021	Policy manager, AssoDelivery	No response
Milan	15.1.2021	Researcher on social innovation and labour market	No response
Milan	14.12.2020	Researcher on urbanised capitalism and platform work	No response
Milan	1.3.2021	Union representative, CISL	No response
Milan	4.5.2021	Union representative, CGIL	Declined to participate, suggested another participant
Milan	4.5.2021	Official in Metropolitan Administration of Milan	No response
Milan	18.3.2021	Researcher, Ca Foscari University	No response
Milan	17.3.2021	Researcher, University of Turin	No response
Milan	8.1.2021	Researcher in thinktank Action Institute	No response
Milan	1.3.2021	Researcher, Politecnico di Milano	Declined to participate, suggested another participant
Milan	5.3.2021	Researcher on Italian platform economy, University of Helsinki	No response
San Francisco	8.4.2021	Member, California Future of Work Commission, California state government	No response
San Francisco	15.3.2021	Representative, Office of Economic Analysis, San Francisco city government	No response

San Francisco	16.4.2021	Representative, Office of Labour Standards Enforcement, San Francisco city government	No response
San Francisco	16.4.2021	Policy manager, Uber	Position of policy manager vacant
San Francisco	16.4.2021	Policy manager, Lyft	No response
San Francisco	17.4.2021	Policy manager, DoorDash	No response
San Francisco	8.4.2021	Research director, Institute for the Future	No response
San Francisco	15.3.2021	Workers' representative, Gig Workers Rising	Positive first reaction, no response after follow-up emails
San Francisco	15.3.2021	Workers' representative, Jobs with Justice San Francisco	No response
San Francisco	8.4.2021	Workers' representative, Trabajadores Unidos	No response
San Francisco	8.1.2021	Researcher on labour law, University of California Hastings	No response
San Francisco	8.1.2021	Researcher in thinktank PPIC	No response
San Francisco	12.1.2021	Researcher on precarious work, University of California Berkeley	Declined to participate, suggested another participant
San Francisco	14.1.2021	Researcher, University of California Berkeley	No response
San Francisco	12.1.2021	Researcher, Saint Louis University	No response
San Francisco	14.1.2021	Retired researcher	No response

Interview Questions – Round 1

City:

Interview number:

Interview participant:

Consent to participate:

Date & time:

Consent to be identifiable:

- To start, what is your position? What is your current role? What is your research about?
- How large is the extent of precarious work in the city? Is it perceived as problematic by the city government?
- Has the emergence of platform companies (such as Uber, Deliveroo, Glovo) made the extent of precarious work more acute?
- What is different between [*ayuntamiento* and *comunidad de Madrid*]? Which level and which entity is responsible for managing platform work?
- Who are the main decisionmakers in the city government (entities, individuals) concerning social and welfare policy? And concerning the response to platforms?
- What actions/initiatives/strategies has the municipality taken in response to precarious work?
- Is there a difference in response between platforms and other precarious sectors (like digital media in SF/fashion in Milan/hostelry sector in Madrid)?
- What is the aim of that response? Provide welfare, create jobs, foster innovation...?
- Has the city taken a different approach to precarity than the regional/national government or other city governments? Why (not)?

- What is the interplay with other levels of government – regional, federal state, national? Which level is seen as responsible for managing the growth of platform work?
- Is the city government independent in responding to platform work? Does it want to be independent or rather let higher governmental levels act? What is the role of relevant national/regional legislation (AB 5, Rider Law)?
- How would you describe the city's response to platform work? Cautious, proactive, favouring platforms, radical, restrictive? And do you think it is successful?
- Where did the city get inspiration for its response? Did it learn from other cities? Or which factors explain the choice of response?
- How would you describe the city's position towards platform companies?
- Why is there no mention of platform workers in recent municipal/regional documents?
- What can other cities learn from Milan/Madrid/San Francisco and its management of the issue?
- Who are other stakeholders or groups that try to influence the municipal response?
- Do you think the city faces a tension or dilemma between letting platforms operate and ensuring the welfare of workers?
- How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected all this – the response to platform work, the role of other stakeholders (unions, platforms...), the motivations of the city government, the influence of the national government?

Interview Questions – Round 2

City:

Interview number:

Interview participant:

Consent to participate:

Date & time:

Consent to be identifiable:

Questions for policymakers

- What is your position? What is your current role?
- What are the main challenges in the local labour market? Do you consider platform work one of them? Why (not)?
- What do you think I most need to know about platform work in Milan/Madrid/San Francisco?
- What do you think are the main benefits or risks of platform work for local workers?
- What action is needed to improve the welfare of precarious or platform workers?
- Do you regard the municipal government responsible for managing the growth of platform work? If so, what involvement have you had personally in developing policies on platform work?
- Which actions has the city government taken in response? And what has been the motivation behind taking them?
- How exactly were these actions implemented and evaluated? Who (and which interest group) was involved in first the consultation stage and then in the implementation?
- Municipal policy documents have hinted at the role of [...] in managing platform work. Could you tell me more about that?

- Does the municipality cooperate with other/higher governmental levels on platform work? If so, are the respective responsibilities clearly defined? And which municipal office/official is involved?
- Does the municipality cooperate with workers' representatives/platform companies? If so, in what capacity and why?
- Can city leaders tackle precarious work effectively? How? Or why not?
- What can other cities learn from your experience with platform work?
- What has been the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on platform workers in your city? And on the municipal response to platform work?
- Who else could tell me about platform work, and the municipal response to it, in the city?

Questions for workers' representatives

- What is your role/position?
- What is the purpose/aim of your organisation? What is its position on platform work?
- How do you try to realise your vision regarding platform work?
- Have recent court rulings/legal provisions/municipal responses sufficiently addressed the precarity of local platform workers? Why (not)?
- What is your relationship with the municipality? What does the municipality do well in terms of managing platform work and responding to workers' challenges?

- Are you in contact with the municipality? If so, with whom or with which office? Do you hold regular talks on the issue of platform work?
- Have you achieved any concrete measures in support of local platform workers in cooperation with the municipality?
- Ideally, which measures/steps/responses would you expect from the city government?
- Are you in contact with other governmental levels (regional, national) on the issue? Why (not)?
- Do you cooperate with workers (or workers' representatives) in other cities? Do you share experiences/strategies?
- How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on the work and welfare of platform workers?
- Has the pandemic helped to visualise the struggles of workers or to influence the municipal response to platform work? If so, how?

Appendix E: Qualitative analysis of interviews

Examples of coding trees based on qualitative analysis of interviews

Due to the large size of the coding trees for the three cases, three examples have been made available in a separate online document for better accessibility and visibility:

<https://gla->

[my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/m_kriz_1_research_gla_ac_uk/EX4qo2VPQt9PoyjEwEKHO3YBQHR7gj7k1cPy2GHmzrBtKw?e=KiCCPX](https://gla-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/m_kriz_1_research_gla_ac_uk/EX4qo2VPQt9PoyjEwEKHO3YBQHR7gj7k1cPy2GHmzrBtKw?e=KiCCPX)

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