DIGITAL PLATFORM - PARADOXES OF UBER AND AIRBNB DEVELOPMENT

With the tourism boom came the boom of digital platforms, which do not comply with labor rights – the workers do not pay taxes, do not have social security nor insurance.

The name given to this new reality is the sharing economy. **Often, this is a service provided by a digital platform, such as Uber, Airbnb, Google or Amazon, companies that are changing cities worldwide.** It is important to think of the paradoxes created by these platforms.

The first is related to algorithms. Yuval Noah Harari – author of several best-sellers such as "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humanity" and "Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow" – states in his latest book that human beings are complex algorithms. We are just information and we will return to information, "dust to dust". The data that circulate in our brains and bodies can be connected to artificial intelligence, allowing us to become super people. At least the economic elite can become superhuman, "meta-human".

It could be partly confirmed by one of Amazon workers' mottos: "we are human, don't treat us like robots". This protest comes from the fact that Jeff Bezos' company has studied every human movement to optimize its workforce, every step of its workers and their robots.

It's not about preventing a worker from sitting down or going to the bathroom, as often happens in stores. It is about defining the steps they have to take, when and how to sit, when and how to go to the bathroom and eat. The result is obvious: a mode of production where workers complain of great stress in the workplace, pressure, and harassment, resulting in serious health problems.

Then, there is the example of the Human Cloud – as opposed to cloud computing –, where many people work on computers in their homes, in different cities, in different countries, in an on-demand system.

For example, Mari Herunidue lives in Manila, Philippines, and provides consulting services for a computer company 15.000 km away; Pete Palma, from Spain, bids in a reverse auction the price of his translation work. In other words, whoever bids the lowest price per word wins in the worldwide auction. The Cloud Human does not have a job: they have tasks or projects, parts of jobs cut into pieces, just like Ford did to manufacturing processes.

Another paradox is related to data. When you go to Amazon and buy a book and a t-shirt, the algorithm learns about your personal preferences, immediately suggesting buying a shaver for a hipster beard. The same goes for Uber, Airbnb and so on.

After the second purchase, and based on your gender, age, Facebook friends, mobile phone model, and GPS position, the algorithm knows more than your family about what you like. But, if we have an industry that depends on Big Data and algorithms, why don't we have any information about its workers? How many are there? Who are they? What do they get? How old are they? Are they men? Are they women?

And if we don't know who they are, if we don't know what they earn, then we know we don't have the tools to protect them from social hazards. We can't protect them in sickness, maternity, unemployment, old age.

And we know more. We know that, if we do not know them, labor legislation does not apply to them, it does not protect them: the algorithm can fire an Uber driver for a drop in their rating. The term is "disconnect". And, when the state doesn't know them, they don't know each other either, which makes it difficult for them to fight together and to represent themselves as a unionized force.

In European countries, the situation is particularly serious. There are most workers on digital platforms. According to a study by the European Commission, around 12% of workers are on these platforms. Growth has kept pace with tourism.

In other words, Uber, Airbnb, Google know everything about these people, they determine how much they earn, what their job is and how they route their work. But the authorities don't know these workers. Platforms do not comply with labor rights and workers do not appear on personnel maps, they do not pay taxes, they do not pay social security, they do not have insurance, they are algorithms. They're workers in the cloud.

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