

L'ÉCONOMIE PUBLIQUE, SOCIALE ET COOPÉRATIVE DANS LA RÉVOLUTION NUMÉRIQUE

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Mutualism and cooperativism to combat precarity in the digitalised world of work

Paper by SMart

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explains an innovative model developed by the cooperative SMart for the so-called atypical workers in the context of the digitalized world of work. After a contextualization of the world of work in the digital age and the collaborative economy, we will examine the characteristics of the SMart model more in detail, especially in terms of mutualisation and social impact. Although initiatives have been recently taken at different political levels (notably the European Pillar of Social Rights) to improve the social conditions of the concerned workers (constantly increasing), it appears that much remains to be done.

1. Evolutions in the world of work

In the last decades, the world of work has changed tremendously. Experts observe that atypical forms of employment are increasing, putting pressure on open-ended employment contracts and social protection models.

The European parliament's is one source stating that: "Standard work (open-ended, full-time employment) remains the dominant form of work, accounting for over half of total employment in the EU. However, the share of standard work has fallen in the EU over the past decade, in favour of an increase in more flexible forms of work."¹ Today, the EU counts 40% of workers in atypical forms of employment².

The International Labour Organization (ILO) also confirms the increase of non-standard contracts in numerous sectors and professions. This trend has been particularly visible in the tertiary sector³, with variations following the countries⁴.

As a category of workers, freelancers are a growing heterogeneous professional group whose income has fallen over the last decades. And particularly, the most rapidly growing category of self-employed are the independent professionals, the self-employed workers without employees, who are engaged in activities of an intellectual nature and/or in services sectors other than farming, craft and retail⁵. On the contrary, the level of income of these workers has been dropping compared to the income these workers gained in the 1990⁶.

"Freelancers are at greater risk than self-employed people with employees of low pay and in-work poverty, inadequate social security coverage, lack of access to career development and training and risks associated with stress and health issues⁷."

Work in the digital age

A recent game changer in the world of work is the digital technology. Today it has reached a degree of sophistication and computing power that leads to the implementation of devices that are capable of breaking down processes, tasks, analogical information, and even objects into a multitude of dematerialized components, of a microscopic size, and to recompose them after computer processing. This capacity is notably implemented in the «0.01 €» tasks offered on the sites of the Mechanical Turk type of Amazon or on Foule Factory.

1 European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Precarious Employment in Europe, Patterns, Trends, and Policy Strategies, IP/A/EMPL/2014-14, 2016.

2 Proposal for a Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed, European Commission, Strasbourg, 13/3/2018, COM (2018) 132 final

3 International Labour Organisation, Non-standard employment around the world: understanding challenges, shaping prospects. Overview, Geneva, 2016

4 Independent Workers and Industrial Relations in Europe synthesis report, March 2018, http://www.i-wire.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/i-wire_final-report.pdf

5 idem

6 Not Alone, trade union and co-operative solutions for self-employed workers, A. Bird, P? Connaty& P. Ross, 2017, coops UK

7 European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Precarious Employment in Europe, Patterns, Trends, and Policy Strategies, IP/A/EMPL/2014-14, 2016.

An ETUI study⁸ clearly explains how “online platforms for on-call work provide a new tool for matching demand for labour to pools of workers waiting for tasks and assignments.” New forms of work are emerging, such as :

- ICT-based mobile work, where workers can perform their job from any place at any time, supported by modern technologies ;
- voucher-based work, where the employment relationship is based on payment for services with a voucher purchased from an authorized organization that covers both pay and social security contributions ;
- portfolio work, where a self-employed individual works for many clients, carrying out small-scale jobs for each of them ;
- crowd employment, where an online platform matches employers and workers, often with larger tasks being split up and divided among a “virtual cloud” of workers ;
- collaborative employment, where freelancers, self-employed or micro enterprises cooperate in some way to overcome limitations of size and professional isolation ;
- crowdsourcing (crowd sourcing), which uses online platforms to enable organizations or individuals to access an indefinite and unknown group of other organizations or individuals to carry out tasks in exchange for payment.

Workers across the globe compete to access micro-tasks even though they are simple, repetitive and decomposed to the extreme so that the worker loses all meaning or understanding of his/her work. The understanding and value of the micro-tasks are then recomposed and processed at another level by the «software owner». Digital technology also has the capacity of processing large amounts of data to extract value : information or decisions.

These economic and managerial techniques are inherited by the Fordist division of labor, but without its counterpart. The Fordist model, when it was set into place early 20th century, proposed a mass production for a mass consumption, the «Fordist pact», which meant that the division of labour and control over labour came along with wage counterpart and, later, social protection. It was the basis for the European social security systems. But, the digital platforms today don't provide that retributive and social protection, it is worse, they disrupt the pact and extract economic value for the the platform owners only.

Collaborative economy

The new forms of work are thus based on digital platforms, which can be driven by community initiatives or profit-focused companies (such as Uber and Airbnb). Both are embedded in the so-called sharing or collaborative economy.

To be so hybrid and polymorphic, the concept of collaborative economy is probably no longer accurate. The collaborative economy, such as the De Croo law (2016) in Belgium or the Terrasse report in France (2016) establish it, has become: an economy of services on demand, via platforms that connect or even intermediate, between different functions (the service provider,

⁸ Gérard Valenduc and Patricia Vendramin, *Work in the digital economy: sorting the old from the new*, Working Paper, European Trade Union Institute, 2016

the consumer, the distributor intermediary, etc.), that individuals can borrow, depending on their degree of commitment to the market (I cook a meal, I deliver a meal, I consume a meal ; to resume a canonical example).

On these platforms that promote relationships between individuals, professionals sometimes also intervene: for example producers in sustainable food for «La Ruche qui dit oui», restaurants for UberEats, or just companies having outsourced a part of their needs (crowdsourcing) to a large pool of workers, who perform often micronized tasks.

In the profit-driven platforms (in opposition to community driven platforms), the value created is captured by the platform, or appropriated by the crowdsourcing company. Their aim is to be disruptive at all costs: to break the market, to break labor law and social rights, to break the prices, to break the genuinely reciprocal (non-monetary) exchange by monetizing without constraint private or social activities. The platforms have the possibility to disconnect users unilaterally from their platforms, following their own efficiency rules, which are often nurtured by the generalized evaluations and ratings of all by all. These evaluation mechanisms replace the middle management role in classic enterprises and strengthen competition among workers and service providers.

A pragmatic experiment

Half-way between the capitalistic and collaborative platform, SMart plays an unprecedented role through a pragmatic approach.

SMart is a shared structure that strives to empower freelance workers through mutualization. SMart is the emanation of workers from various sectors, who join together, in a cooperative with a social purpose, who borrow its legal person, to equip themselves with the means to develop their own economic activities in complete autonomy and to obtain socialized and taxed incomes.

SMart is present in nine European countries and generates nearly 200 million euros of turnover, concerning more than 35,000 workers every year.

In 2013 graphic designers working through SMart also started to invoice their work as bikers for a food delivery company called «Take Eat Easy». Take Eat Easy was a Belgian start-up specializing in meal deliveries from restaurants to individuals who could make their order via an online platform. In March 2015, 89 workers were riding for this platform. One year later, in March 2016, 434 couriers were using SMart to declare their daily food delivery shifts thereby finding an alternative way to the self-employed status which was required by the platform Take Eat Easy. At that time, the English food delivery platform Deliveroo also entered the Belgian market.

The number of bikers working through SMart increasing exponentially, SMart begun to take a close interest in the working conditions of these couriers. Several aspects were considered problematic:

- Execrable remuneration (below legal minimums);
- payment “per delivery” (applied by Take Eat Easy at that time);
- high risks of accidents and badly covered since badly declared;
- the practice of «Priority booking at Take Eat Easy» consisting of the attribution of deliveries to the most successful couriers resulting in a system where the remuneration of the courier is based on the number of shifts allocated by the algorithm.

- a bonus system based on the performance of couriers :
 - > Rewarding risk taking;
 - > establishing an aggressive competition between couriers.

The incompatibilities between both models led to two choices: forbidding the bikers to use SMart for this kind of work or to find an agreement with the platforms. SMart decided to opt for the latter as it was an opportunity to negotiate better working conditions for the riders, which was something new, an international scoop. As an employer, SMart started a negotiation process from January 2016 onwards which resulted in May 2016 in a commercial agreement signed by Deliveroo and Take Eat Easy: a fixed hourly rate, minimum three hours shifts, telephone cost reimbursements and a 50% reimbursement of bicycle repairs, bike technical inspection and road safety training for each new courier, accident and civil liability insurance and a helmet.

Unfortunately, the two agreements ended: the first because of bankruptcy in June 2016 (TEE riders that worked through SMart were the only ones paid thanks to a salary guarantee fund) and the latter in October 2017 because Deliveroo decided unilaterally to end the agreement, as the new De Croo law made it unnecessary to use SMart to “hire” workers⁹. During the autumn of 2017, SMart was planning to renegotiate the terms of the agreement with Deliveroo and sign a Collective Labor Agreement together with the unions to improve the working conditions of the platform workers, such as the wage scales, which would have been a world premiere.

This experience, as the defense of artists at many occasions, defines SMart as an innovative structure that can provide pragmatic solutions to new issues linked to the labour market evolutions.

⁹ <http://smartbe.be/fr/news/la-gouvernement-deregule-deliveroo-renonce-aux-coursiers-salaries/>

2. Transform the world of work to the benefit of the worker

It doesn't seem plausible to stop the capitalistic platforms, but SMart believes we can help to mitigate the toxic effects and, in dialogue with social partners and politicians, neutralize them by collectively:

- encouraging the emergence of new solidarity among workers adapted to this digital age;
- strengthening the market power of these workers, their ability to negotiate fair remuneration and dignified and respectful working conditions;
- improving labor law and social protection schemes so that they can effectively apply to workers in these new markets, without compromising on the quality of standards and high level of protection achieved in most countries of the European Union;
- seizing this evolution as an opportunity to address the challenges of these workers properly and to build an inclusive society by bridging autonomy and solidarity.

The worker remains the main creator of economic and social value, from which she/he should be able to derive effective rights, lifelong protection and the ability to survive in the world. Today, given the labor market evolutions, and the important decrease of labor that is envisaged in the next couple of decades (estimates foresee between 10% to over 50% of existing employment to be replaced by artificial intelligence and robotics in the next 20 years, without knowing how many new jobs will be created¹⁰), there is an urge to give new meaning to work. Even more, there is an urge to give means to workers to reappropriate their work conditions and relationships, to own the value and the wealth they create and to access the rights which result from their work.

Mutualisation

Basing on the principle of mutualisation, SMart reinvests all its benefits in the development of the services. As a company shared by all its members, SMart mutualises:

- Its legal person: any freelancer can use the shared enterprise to develop a project, an economic activity, all without yielding anything on social rights and autonomy. Thus bringing together the best of two worlds: the freedom to work autonomously, and access to the legal status as employees which is the safest one as it leads to the best social protection coverage;
- extended administrative services including bookkeeping & financial aspects of all economic activities;
- the risks (social risks, accidents, civil liability, commercial, financial, especially cash flow, etc.), inherent to any economic activity particularly through its debt collection service;
- convinced that economic dynamism and security (on a regulatory, social and fiscal level) go hand in hand and cannot be satisfied with a simple «dematerialized» and

¹⁰ World Economic Forum, European Economic and Sociale Committee, ILO...

« automated » relationship, SMart promotes proximity and personalized accompaniment of freelancers by dedicating over 50% of its staff to social, administration and management missions (coaching, training, individual advice etc.).

The shared enterprise is deeply committed to solidarity and autonomy of the members: the pooling of resources, tools and services; the total absence of remuneration of capital, which allows leaving the surplus value of the work of the members where it must be: in their hands; and a participative governance of all its stakeholders.

A cooperative with a social purpose

The International Organisation of Industrial and Service Cooperatives (CICOPA) has written extensively about the importance of Cooperative enterprises advancing livelihoods and creating jobs. They represent 9% of the world's employed population, involving at least 229,4 million people worldwide. The largest 300 cooperatives had a turnover of 2,164.23 billion USD in 2015¹¹. "Cooperatives are critical to the subsistence and livelihoods of millions of people, in sectors including agriculture, finance and housing... Cooperatives reduce the effects of precarious and informal working arrangements"¹². The ILO explains in a 2009 report how cooperatives are resilient to crises¹³.

For SMart, the cooperative model makes it possible to dissolve the ownership of the capital in the collective, while maintaining an extreme flexibility, just because of its mechanism of variable capital (it grows not by decision of the general assembly to emit new shares, but only by the subscription of shares by the members).

The funding of the company is provided by:

- The capital contributions of the members;
- a single percentage (by country) of the amounts invoiced to clients by autonomous economic activities. In Belgium, this percentage is set at 6,5%. This amount paid by the clients represents the cost of the commercial, social and fiscal security of their transactions and the ethical business framework added by SMart;
- an alternative financing resulting from the mutualisation, from :
 - > economies of scale (on insurance, for example);
 - > redistributive mechanisms organized by the State (le Crédit d'Impôt pour la Compétitivité et l'Emploi in France, reductions of employers' contributions in Belgium);
 - > a principle of solidarity-based redistribution specific to SMart, following tax reductions (lower social contributions or taxes, for example). In Belgium, this mechanism has been partly implemented since 2015 in the method of calculating the wage cost based on a multiplier coefficient of the gross salary.

¹¹ The world cooperative monitor, ICA & EURICSE, 2017

¹² Cooperatives and Employment Second Global Report. CICOPA, 2017

¹³ Resilience of the cooperative business model in times of crisis / Johnston Birchall, Lou Hammond Ketilson ; International Labour Office, Sustainable Enterprise Programme. - Geneva: ILO, 2009

The social purpose, stated in the articles, ensures that no one can expect to benefit from their capital contribution. In matters of corporate governance, the amount of capital subscribed does not confer any advantage, as the principle: one person, one voice reigns.

The participation of all stakeholders is a crucial aspect of SMart's democratic governance. It is made possible through the involvement of the SMart community through: the board, general assemblies, working groups, surveys, etc. These allow for a new type of social dialogue, that is not only enabled through representative elections but also through direct involvement of all stakeholders i.e. mainly freelance members, but also their clients, the permanent staff and partners.

The development of the markets, of work and the legal and socio-economic context of the territories on which SMart operates, the endogenous growth and diversity of activities carried out by our members, are constantly evolving. Participation is the most effective way to be in line with the needs of members.

Moreover, participation is inevitable in a group which has extended the automation of administrative processes in order to be able to absorb a considerable amount of operations. Participation of stakeholders is crucial to maintain a strong balance between the treatment of that mass and the taking into account of singularities.

3. The issue of social impact

As a cooperative with a social purpose, the issue of social protection is of utmost relevance. However, we agree with SAW-B, a Belgian movement for the economic and social alternative and SMart partner that:

«Several causes can be found for the relative confusion that prevails in most minds when reference is made to social impact measurement. We note the following: the intrinsic difficulty of defining the concepts, the multiplicity of sources of inspiration, the plurality of objectives and variations of the evaluation process.»¹⁴

The question of social impact presupposes many concepts, taken for granted: the social, the impact, the measure, the value and the utility (determining the meaning of a positive or negative measure), etc. Yet none of them goes without saying. The social in the sociological sense or political, even trade union? The impact, the shock as such, or the trace of this shock? The shock of what against what? The effect of what cause? Measurements that are quantitative or qualitative? How to avoid that metrics and concepts are predefined just to get the desired results?

In short, social impact is a concept even more poorly controlled than GDP, growth rate or purchasing power. However, it is nonetheless strongly discussed, and many methodologies have been developed to establish at the same time the legitimacy and its operational nature.

SMart received the prize for best proven impact of Social Innovation based on ICT from the European Commission Joint Research Center (November 2017), however, the work on SMart's social impact is continuing to be improved. Some of the features that have already been clearly identified allow us to open the debate.

¹⁴ <http://www.econospheres.be/Evaluation-de-l-impact-social-de>

Politically, SMart has gained exemplary visibility as a model: its concept of a shared enterprise coupled with its economic success (independent of any subsidy and without selecting the members on the basis of any economic profitability) is today recognized, criticized, scrutinized and studied. The cooperative has contributed to the emergence of the concept of a shared enterprise as an innovative model with a real economic and social future in the Small Business Act of the Brussels-Capital Region¹⁵.

Functionally, it seems that SMart democratized considerably the access of all of us to an autonomous economic activity, by neutralizing most of the regulatory and administrative obstacles, as well as the risks inherent to any entrepreneurial initiative. SMart allows a variety of profiles (from entrepreneurs to hobbyists) to declare «atypical» and lawful income (like selling at Christmas markets), and proposes to others a viable and easy way to declare income that would otherwise fall into informal economy (by ignorance of procedures). All this to the advantage of both the State, as taxes and social contributions are paid, and members, who socialize their income (opening access to social rights).

From an economic point of view, for all promoters of entrepreneurial projects or initiatives, its management toolbox, its shared legal personality and its risk coverage system offer an alternative to the creation of an association or company. SMart contributes undoubtedly, to curb the number of companies and associations, but also helps to reduce the number of tax or social disputes and, above all, bankruptcies - particularly in the niche of the self-employed, the unemployed and very small businesses (TPE), precisely where a bankruptcy has the most dramatic consequences for the person.

Last but not least, because of its ever-growing number of active members and the volume of business they deal with, SMart has become an ecosystem as such. Workers and / or entrepreneurs, previously isolated from each other or as self-employed or freelancers or as «informal» workers, are now associated in a single enterprise: with all the potential in terms of networking, cooperation (by sectors, professions, affinities, projects) and social dialogue (representation, defense) that emerge.

¹⁵ «Companies, households, but also public authorities will increase their demand for» fragments of work «: the mission, the project, the task. Outsourcing and crowdsourcing will now be part of the organizations toolbox, part of full production. On the side of enterprising workers, the need for autonomy, re-appropriation of their work, meaning and value, but also security and continuity will find answers in companies they will share to increase their ability to undertake and their market power. These shared enterprises, most often of cooperative form and anchored in the social and solidarity economy, will be considered as one of the answers - in the range of tools proposed by the Region of Brussels - to the ongoing transformation of the modes of production, organization and the labor market. «

4. The political trends

Major political players as The European Union and International Labour Organization have addressed the trends mentioned in the beginning of this paper and both institutes argue for better social protection for all workers.

European Pillar of Social Rights

To tackle the changing labour market challenges, in April 2017, the European Commission published the European Pillar of Social Rights under the impulse of president Juncker. The aim of the initiative is to neutralize some of the disruptive effects of the above mentioned societal evolutions. It was unanimously endorsed by the EU Employment Council at the end of last year and proclaimed by all three EU institutions. The Gothenburg concluding report served to frame the follow-up of the Summit at last month's European Council. The pillar bases upon 20 key principles, structured around three categories: 1) Equal opportunities and access to the labour market, 2) Fair working conditions and 3) Social protection and inclusion.

The document integrates feedback formulated by stakeholders (EU institutions, national authorities and parliaments, social partners and NGO's) during a consultation process finalized in 2016. The European Parliament was one of those stakeholders and it adopted a Resolution on the Pillar on the 19th of January 2017¹⁶ in which it focusses on the necessity for the Pillar to not only be a declaration of principles or good intentions but to strengthen the social rights with practical and specific tools (legislations, policy-making mechanisms and financial instruments...).

SMart supports this statement. As to the question on what measures could be implemented to improve the working conditions of independent and freelance workers, SMart proposes the following concrete measures:

- One of the specificities of the European countries is to have created protection systems with a great social dimension (compared to the rest of the world). The EU, in order to be truly social, could set minimum standards for social protection that the member states must comply with to ensure a good level of social protection. This would strengthen the convergence of European countries and minimize social dumping. Only binding tools such as directives can ensure this leveling up of the social protection, especially regarding the minima. Concrete examples such as the maternity leave directive or the one that is emerging for parental leave, can serve as examples.
- In certain sectors of activity (as in the case of translation), the self-employed wish to be able to set minimum fees so that they are not put in competition with employees or between them. This pricing by freelancers can be allowed legally by excluding them from the directive from European competition law.
- The specificity and added value of freelance cooperatives, such as SMart or the Cooperatives of Activity and Employment in France, should be recognized. These shared companies allow freelancers to lead their professional activities in full autonomy (as self-employed) while benefiting from a double solidarity: that linked to the social

¹⁶ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2017-0010+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2017-0010+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

status of an employee with a potential access to social protection at a national level, as well as the mutualisation and sharing within the cooperative. Workers play a double role: they are workers and owners of the company. Recognizing the specificity of such structures is a way of connecting self-employment to social protection. We must be able to recognize the freelancers' activities as economic entities in their own right (for example for public or subsidized contracts) and the cooperative as a (economic, financial and legal) support structure and as a guarantor to clients (such as banks) or donors.

Protection and access to social security for all workers

SMart believes that a social Europe is the only option for the future. Our globalized economy and the digital revolution, require an adaptation of the control of work i.e. moving towards more flexibility and mobility; though in order to control the precarity of (freelance) workers, social welfare systems need to be improved, notably by strengthening the rights of the individual.

Social welfare systems are organised differently in the European countries, as they are the result of an empirical construction that was never intended to be unified.

The principle of social welfare is not new, in fact, most systems were set up in the aftermath of the Second World War. Although the level of protection differs according to the regime or the country, the areas covered are generally the same i.e. health risks, loss of employment risks, risks linked to ageing, and measures that help families (family allowance, housing benefit, single-parent allowance, etc.). It may be useful to point out that the higher level of social welfare, offered in certain sectors, is the result of a historic willingness to improve the attractiveness of certain sectors in a context of full employment. The example of railway workers in France, who benefit from a special regime (including retirement at age 55) illustrates this well¹⁷.

The differences between statuses, even though they originate from eminently legitimate social struggles, have become too important with regard to the general and universal nature of covered risks. In fact, the proportion of poorly protected workers continues to grow and calls into question the legitimacy of maintaining higher levels of protection for certain workers. Not to address the need to reform our social welfare system is not only unfair with respect to all workers but also dangerous: for, in the current context, it also means taking the risk of downgrading it. Can we continue to treat the risks related to illness, unemployment or old age differently while workers are increasingly forced to change social statuses throughout their working life or even combine several different statuses?

Shouldn't we try to simplify access to the social welfare system by making no distinctions between the two categories of the active population and instead differentiate between those who derive the majority of their income from labour, and those who derive the majority of their income from their assets?

This simplification, which boils down to distinguishing only two categories – i.e. workers and people with patrimonial means – would standardise social protection for all workers, employees, self-employed, executives, artisans, agricultural workers, liberal professions, temporary workers, artists, etc.

¹⁷ Refaire le monde...du travail, une alternative à l'ubérisation de l'économie. S. Graceffa, éditions repas, 2016, Valence

One of the negative consequences of not having a European social status is the lack of mobility of workers within the Union. According to EURES (the European Job Mobility Portal), two to three million jobs are not filled in the European Union although the overall rate of unemployment is around 10% (and 25% for young people). The same study shows that 59% of workers who move without first securing a job, found one within the first year (compared to 35% who stayed in their own country). The European Union offers enormous opportunities for those who are prepared to take the initiative. However, Europeans are extremely static due to very real linguistic, cultural and psychological barriers. The lack of coherence between employment contracts and statuses within the Union reinforces these barriers. Introducing a universal European social welfare system would guarantee workers the security that is lacking today.

The launch of the European Labour Authority next year should help enhance cross-border mobility in Europe.

The ILO's Global Commission on the Future of Work

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is an international organ composed out of governments, representative workers' and employers' organizations that analyses and intervenes in the labour market and the world of work. Pascale Charhon describes in her 2017 paper¹⁸ how "the ILO was created in 1919 to promote social justice. The 1944 Philadelphia Declaration clarified and developed this action principle. ILO's means of action were the adoption of international standards in the form of conventions which, like treaties, provide obligations for the Member States which ratified them, as well as recommendations.

The ILO Convention (N° 102) concerning social security of 1952 is the flagship of all ILO social security conventions as it is the only international instrument that establishes worldwide-agreed minimum standards for all nine branches of social security which are: medical care, sickness benefit, unemployment benefit, old-age benefit, employment injury benefit, family benefit, maternity benefit, invalidity benefit, survivors' benefit.

The concept of "decent work" is another important concept tightly linked with the quality of employment and introduced by the ILO in 1999. Four components are elaborated under the concept of "decent work": employment, social protection, workers' rights and social dialogue. Employment covers work of all kinds and has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Thus, decent work applies not just to workers in the formal economy but also to unregulated wage workers, the self-employed and home workers."¹⁹

Over the last years, the ILO has closely studied the evolutions connected to the fourth industrial revolution and new technologies. An in-depth examination of the future of work has been initiated within the Global Commission on the Future of Work. The commission is composed of representatives from governments, NGO's, think tanks and the academic world. Four «centenary conversations»²⁰ structure the debates around: Work and society, Decent jobs for all, The organization of work and production, The governance of work. The final report expected in 2019 will describe how a society can be created in which decent and sustainable work opportunities prevail.

18 Facing new forms of employment, what are the European responses? Keys to understanding the current debates. P. Charhon, PLS editions, 2017, Brussels

19 Facing new forms of employment, what are the European responses? Keys to understanding the current debates. Charhon Pascale, 2017.

20 http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/future-of-work/WCMS_569528/lang--en/index.htm

5. What next?

SMart thus prefigures at the European level a new form of organization, which is able to provide answers to the current challenges of the labour markets (the emergence of freelancing, platform workers and precariat) as well as those of the coming decades (linked to digitalization and robotization).

Even though the EU and ILO have acknowledged the growth of self-employed and atypical employment world-wide, and recognized the need for a better social protection and the improvement of working conditions of all workers, much remains to be done. The EU is tackling the issue at a legal level through the European Pillar of Social Rights (through recommendations²¹), the ILO has proposed its Floors of Social Protection. These initiatives have been ratified by the EU Member States, who in the same time have actually reduced, in practice, the level of coverage of salaried workers and made it more difficult to access social in the last decade, in the name of austerity.

SMart detects difficulties in the debates to take the specificities of freelancers into consideration. In fact SMart believes it is not possible to transpose the rules and mechanisms created for salaried workers (model from industry-based economy) to self-employed and autonomous workers (working primarily in the service economy). Many elements divide the two: the property of working tools (that often belong to the worker), the possibility to actually control safety and security at the working place (as these change often and are not necessarily meant for the activity provided by the freelancer). And probably one of the most difficult aspects to solve is how to make fair and financially sustainable unemployment benefits (or income in case of no work) accessible to autonomous workers?

We believe that freelancers' cooperatives such as SMart and organizations such as Cooperatives d'Activités et d'Emploi in France could actually be interesting places to experiment solutions, designed by all parties involved: the freelance worker, the clients, the unions and the employer (that is the cooperative governed by its workers) and the State. This would mean that all parties should agree on general objectives (a strong and adapted social protection) and be willing to be creative as to the ways to make them accessible to workers that are autonomous, which in our view means finding functional equivalents to what the fordist model proposed to salaried workers, but adapted to the service economy and sharing economy.

These open debates are necessary to find solutions for a rapidly changing world of work, in which, even more than today, work may not be available to all. How can such a society be sustainable? How can it be inclusive? These questions are even more urgent when considering the ecological transition and the aspiration of a growing number of citizens to participate in the development of their communities (urban gardens, open source activities, fablabs...).

We believe the worst case scenarios regarding labour market evolutions have to be taken into consideration and tackling the current problems at the "fringe" of labour market is the best way to be proactive.

²¹ Proposal for a Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed, European Commission, Strasbourg, 13/3/20

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