

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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GIG ECONOMY E A UNIÃO EUROPEIA: DA PEDAGOGIA DO TRABALHO A UMA PEDAGOGIA DO TRABALHO EM PLATAFORMAS

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(Abstract) The gig economy has become a key site through which labor transformation in the European Union is being experienced, regulated, and contested. While most existing analyses focus on employment classification, social protection, and the governance of digital platforms, less attention has been paid to the pedagogical implications of digitalized labor. This article addresses that gap by arguing that the gig economy must be interpreted not only as a legal or economic phenomenon, but also as a transformation in the educational, cultural, and subjective meaning of work. The study aims to rethink the pedagogy of work in light of platform precarity and digital mediation, advancing the concept of a pedagogy of platform work. Methodologically, the article adopts a theoretical-conceptual approach grounded in a critical and interdisciplinary review of the literature on pedagogy of work, platform labor, algorithmic management, and labor transformation in the European context. Its central argument unfolds in four steps: first, it shows that the classical “crisis of work” has evolved into a more specific condition of platformization; second, it interprets digital platforms as pedagogical environments that shape conduct, self-regulation, and worker subjectivity; third, it re-reads Bauman, Rifkin, and Méda as complementary lenses for understanding instability, technological mediation, and the changing social meaning of work; and fourth, it outlines a normative proposal for a pedagogy of platform work centered on rights-awareness, critical digital literacy, solidarity, democratic participation, and person-centered attention to vulnerability. The article’s original contribution lies in connecting labor studies and pedagogy in order to show that the European gig economy is not only reorganizing work, but also redefining the forms of formation required to inhabit, interpret, and contest platform capitalism.

Keywords: Gig economy; European Union; Pedagogy of work; Platform work; Algorithmic management

(Resumo) A Gig Economy tornou-se um espaço central por meio do qual as transformações do trabalho na União Europeia vêm sendo vividas, reguladas e contestadas. Embora a maior parte das análises existentes se concentre na classificação do vínculo de emprego, na proteção social e na governança das plataformas digitais, menor atenção tem sido dada às implicações pedagógicas do trabalho plataformizado. Este artigo enfrenta essa lacuna ao sustentar que a Gig Economy deve ser interpretada

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Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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não apenas como um fenômeno jurídico ou econômico, mas também como uma transformação no significado educativo, cultural e subjetivo do trabalho. O estudo tem por objetivo repensar a pedagogia do trabalho à luz da precariedade em plataformas e da mediação digital, propondo o conceito de uma pedagogia do trabalho em plataformas. Metodologicamente, o artigo adota uma abordagem teórico-conceitual, fundada em uma revisão crítica e interdisciplinar da literatura sobre pedagogia do trabalho, trabalho em plataformas, gestão algorítmica e transformações laborais no contexto europeu. Seu argumento central desenvolve-se em quatro movimentos: primeiro, demonstra que a clássica “crise do trabalho” evoluiu para uma condição mais específica de platformização; segundo, interpreta as plataformas digitais como ambientes pedagógicos que moldam condutas, autorregulação e subjetividade dos trabalhadores; terceiro, relê Bauman, Rifkin e Méda como lentes complementares para compreender a instabilidade, a mediação tecnológica e a mudança no significado social do trabalho; e, quarto, delinea uma proposta normativa de pedagogia do trabalho em plataformas centrada em consciência de direitos, letramento digital crítico, solidariedade, participação democrática e atenção à vulnerabilidade centrada na pessoa. A contribuição original do artigo reside em articular estudos do trabalho e pedagogia para demonstrar que a Gig Economy na União Europeia não apenas reorganiza o trabalho, mas também redefine as formas de formação necessárias para habitar, interpretar e contestar criticamente o capitalismo de plataforma.

Palavras-chave: Gig Economy; União Europeia; Pedagogia do trabalho; Trabalho em plataformas; Gestão algorítmica.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of work in Europe has entered a new phase in which digital infrastructures no longer merely support labor processes but increasingly organize, distribute, and evaluate them. Within this broader restructuring, the gig economy has emerged as one of the clearest expressions of platform-mediated labor: flexible in appearance, fragmented in practice, and often marked by uncertain social protection and asymmetrical dependence. The European Union itself has recognized that platform work is no longer a marginal phenomenon but a structural issue requiring institutional attention, particularly where algorithmic management, employment status, and working conditions are concerned (European Union, 2024). International and European research has likewise shown that digital labor platforms are reshaping the organization of labor across sectors, intensifying forms of on-demand work that blur the boundaries between autonomy and subordination (ILO, 2021; Fernández-Macías et al., 2023). Read in a longer historical perspective, this development belongs to the wider technological reconfiguration of labor anticipated in earlier debates on the erosion of stable industrial employment and the rise of new digitally mediated forms of work (Rifkin, 2004). Yet although the gig economy has been extensively examined through legal, economic, and regulatory lenses, its pedagogical implications remain comparatively underexplored.

This omission is not secondary. The platformization of labor does not simply alter contractual forms; it redefines the lived experience of work, the horizon of professional identity, and the conditions under which subjects are educated to understand themselves as workers. If, as Bauman argued, modern solidity has yielded to a liquid condition in which durability, predictability, and institutional anchoring are progressively weakened (Bauman, 2000), then platform labor should be understood not as an isolated anomaly but as one of the most coherent expressions of that liquidity. In such a context, insecurity exceeds the

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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economic sphere. It becomes existential, because it affects the worker's capacity to project a future; social, because it individualizes risk and weakens collective bonds; and educational, because it displaces the traditional relation between formation, qualification, and occupational continuity. Bauman's reflections on globalization further clarify how this instability is embedded in wider transformations that unsettle both social membership and life trajectories (Bauman, 2005b). At the same time, the educational field has long been affected by neoliberal and globalizing pressures that recast learning in increasingly instrumental, competitive, and adaptive terms (Apple; Kenway; Singh, 2005; Díez Gutiérrez, 2010). The gig economy radicalizes these tendencies: workers are asked to be permanently available, digitally competent, self-managing, and adaptable, while the burden of uncertainty is increasingly privatized. In this sense, platform labor reopens a question that the pedagogy-of-work tradition has addressed for decades: how should work be thought educationally when its forms, meanings, and institutions are in flux? Classical and contemporary contributions in this field insist that work is not merely an economic fact but also a formative, anthropological, and ethical one (Bocca, 1998; Reyro García, 1999; Alessandrini, 2004; Alessandrini, 2012). More recent reflections have likewise reaffirmed that the relationship between work and education must be interpreted dynamically, especially under conditions of transformation that challenge inherited models of professional socialization and personal development (Palma, 2018). From this standpoint, platform labor is not only a new labor regime; it is also a new pedagogical problem.

This article departs precisely from that problem. It does not seek to offer a doctrinal analysis of European platform-work regulation, nor to reconstruct exhaustively the legal evolution of the sector. Its aim is rather theoretical and conceptual: to rethink the pedagogy of work in light of the gig economy and the institutional transformations occurring within the European Union. More specifically, the article asks what kind of educational and formative response becomes necessary when labor is increasingly mediated by platforms, individualized by ratings and metrics, and detached from stable employment trajectories. Such a question presupposes that the pedagogy of work must now be renewed beyond the traditional coordinates of employment, unemployment, and vocational adjustment (Cegolon, 2020a). It also requires preserving the critical and interpretive vocation of this pedagogical field, rather than reducing it to a mere discourse of adaptation or employability (Alessandrini, 2012; Palma, 2018). Against this background, the argument developed here is that the gig economy in the European Union calls for a pedagogy of work capable of confronting platform precarity, digital mediation, and the formation of workers as reflective, rights-bearing, and socially situated subjects within a changing institutional order (European Union, 2024).

METHOD

This article adopts a theoretical-conceptual methodology grounded in a critical review of the literature. Its purpose is not to test causal hypotheses, quantify trends, or present original field data, but to reinterpret the gig economy in the European Union through the

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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conceptual lens of the pedagogy of work. Such an approach is methodologically appropriate because, within this tradition, work is not reduced to an economic variable or an institutional arrangement; rather, it is understood as a formative, social, and anthropological experience that shapes subjectivity, agency, and the conditions of human development (Bocca, 1998; Reyro García, 1999; Alessandrini, 2004). A conceptual inquiry is therefore justified insofar as the object under examination is not only the empirical expansion of platform labor, but also the transformation of the educational meanings historically attached to work.

More specifically, the analysis is developed within a critical-hermeneutic orientation. This means that the literature is not treated as a neutral repository of information to be summarized, but as a field of interpretation through which the contemporary reorganization of labor can be conceptually reconstructed and normatively assessed. The method consists in revisiting central categories elaborated within the pedagogy-of-work tradition and rereading them in light of platform-mediated labor, digital fragmentation, and the erosion of stable employment frameworks in Europe. In this sense, the article proceeds through an interpretive dialogue between earlier pedagogical reflections on work and more recent concerns regarding instability, precarization, and the changing relation between formation and labor. Alessandrini (2012) is particularly important here, insofar as she conceives the pedagogy of work as a dynamic field capable of engaging structural transformations without surrendering its critical vocation. This perspective is reinforced by Palma (2018), who emphasizes the need to rethink the nexus between education and work under conditions of profound social change, and by Cegolon (2020b), who reconstructs the development of the field while also indicating the need for renewed conceptual tools. Within this framework, the article reuses and expands categories already developed in previous reflections on labor insecurity — especially the distinction between passive adaptation and active pedagogical response — transposing them to the specific realities of platform labor in the European Union.

The literature review is interdisciplinary but internally ordered by a precise conceptual logic. It brings into relation texts from the pedagogy of work with broader reflections on the educational significance of labor transformation, selecting sources not according to a merely chronological criterion but according to their analytical relevance for the problem under discussion. The review serves a double function: first, to reconstruct the principal pedagogical coordinates through which work has been interpreted as a formative experience; second, to identify the conceptual resources capable of extending those coordinates toward the realities of digitalized, unstable, and platform-mediated labor. For this reason, the analysis is organized around thematic nuclei such as instability, formation, subjectivity, and the educational implications of labor change, drawing especially on Alessandrini (2004; 2012), Palma (2018), and Cegolon (2020b). The method is therefore not descriptive, but reconstructive and problem-oriented: it seeks to clarify how the pedagogy of work can be rearticulated in response to the transformations imposed by platform capitalism in the contemporary European context.

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion that follows develops the argument advanced in the preceding sections by moving from diagnosis to reconstruction. Rather than treating the gig economy in the European Union exclusively as a legal category or a labor-market arrangement, this section approaches it as a broader transformation in the social experience of work: a transformation that affects not only contractual status and economic security, but also the cultural meanings, formative processes, and subjective dispositions through which labor is lived and interpreted. The aim, therefore, is not simply to describe platformized work, but to understand what it reveals about the ongoing reorganization of work under digital capitalism and about the pedagogical questions that such reorganization inevitably raises.

The analysis unfolds through four interconnected movements. It begins by re-examining the crisis of work in light of platformization, showing how instability today is increasingly mediated by algorithms, ratings, and fragmented task structures. It then advances the article's central claim that platforms function not only as labor intermediaries, but also as pedagogical environments that shape conduct, discipline, and self-understanding. On this basis, the discussion reinterprets the contributions of Bauman, Rifkin, and Méda in relation to the European gig economy, before turning to a more explicitly normative proposal: the elaboration of a pedagogy of platform work capable of linking digital transformation to dignity, rights, and collective agency.

From the crisis of work to the platformization of work

The instability of work is not a novelty of the platform age. For decades, critical analyses of late modern labor have described the erosion of stable employment, the weakening of durable occupational identities, and the decline of linear professional trajectories. In this sense, the contemporary gig economy does not inaugurate insecurity *ex nihilo*; rather, it intensifies tendencies already associated with the technological reorganization of production and the broader liquefaction of social life. Rifkin (2004) had already identified the structural displacement of industrial certainties under digital transformation, while Bauman (2000) interpreted modern labor as increasingly exposed to discontinuity, reversibility, and fragility. The crisis of work, however, has now assumed forms that exceed those earlier formulations, even as it remains intelligible through them. What is required, therefore, is not a conceptual rupture, but an update.

That update becomes necessary once instability is no longer understood primarily through unemployment, underemployment, or the disappearance of Fordist careers. In the current phase, precariousness is increasingly organized through digital infrastructures that fragment labor into tasks, modulate access to work intermittently, and relocate managerial power into opaque systems of ranking, matching, and evaluation. Research on digital labor platforms has shown that workers are frequently subjected to reputational dependence, customer surveillance, and uncertain employment classification, often without the protections historically associated with formal subordination (ILO, 2021; Fernández-Macías et al., 2023). The European institutional debate itself reflects this shift, recognizing

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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that platform work entails specific problems of algorithmic management, employment status, and working conditions (European Union, 2024). What is at stake, then, is not merely a shortage of stable jobs, but a reconfiguration of labor control in which responsibility is dispersed while dependency persists (Eurofound, 2024a).

For this reason, the older language of the “crisis of work” must be specified as the platformization of work. By platformization, this article does not mean only the spread of apps or digital intermediation, but a mode of organizing labor through data extraction, continuous evaluation, algorithmic coordination, and the legal externalization of employer obligations. In this respect, platform labor combines intensified rationalization with individualized exposure to risk. The worker is standardized through metrics, timings, and ratings, yet simultaneously constructed as a formally autonomous actor responsible for absorbing uncertainty. Ritzer’s (2020) reflections on digital rationalization are especially useful here, as are recent analyses of algorithmic management and regulatory responses in the European context (Eurofound, 2024b; European Commission JRC, 2025).

Once work is reorganized in this way, the transformation cannot be confined to labor-market structure or legal doctrine alone. It also affects how insecurity is lived, interpreted, and normalized in everyday practice. A labor regime governed by ratings, visibility, and permanent evaluability shapes not only economic vulnerability but also conduct, expectations, and self-relation. In this sense, the social consequences of precarious work described by Bauman (2005a) acquire a new technological mediation, while the decent-work concerns raised in contemporary debate become inseparable from questions of subjectivity and formation (ILO, 2024). If the crisis of work has become the platformization of work, then the analysis must also ask how platforms educate workers into particular habits of adaptation, presentation, and compliance.

The gig economy as a pedagogical environment

Digital platforms should not be understood solely as labor-market intermediaries, matching mechanisms, or technical infrastructures for the allocation of tasks. They must also be interpreted as environments endowed with pedagogical force. In a sense consonant with Giroux’s (2003) broader understanding of pedagogy as dispersed across public and cultural formations, platform labor educates without presenting itself as education. It does so by organizing the practical horizons within which workers learn what counts as efficiency, availability, reliability, and success. Under conditions increasingly shaped by digital access and networked coordination, as Rifkin (2000) foresaw, work becomes inseparable from mediated regimes of behavioral formation.

This pedagogical function is embedded in the concrete architecture of platform labor itself. Interfaces, notifications, rankings, acceptance indicators, customer feedback systems, and performance dashboards do more than coordinate transactions: they orient conduct. Workers are induced to respond rapidly, remain perpetually reachable, minimize inactivity, and calibrate decisions in anticipation of opaque evaluative consequences. In this respect, labor organization becomes a formative apparatus. What is learned is not transmitted through explicit instruction, but through repeated exposure to coded incentives and

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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sanctions that sediment particular habits of self-regulation. Recent analyses of algorithmic management show precisely this capacity of platforms to steer behavior through monitoring, data-driven evaluation, and automated decision systems that shape the worker's room for maneuver while rarely appearing as direct command (Eurofound, 2024a; European Commission JRC, 2025). Even where formal autonomy is preserved in contractual language, behavioral latitude is narrowed in practice by systems that reward compliance, punctuality, responsiveness, and acceptance-rate optimization (Milanez; Lemmens; Ruggiu, 2025). The worker thus learns, through labor design itself, how to inhabit the platform's normative universe.

The formative effects of this environment extend beyond conduct into subjectivity. Platforms do not merely distribute tasks; they cultivate a mode of self-relation in which visibility, flexibility, and uninterrupted responsiveness are progressively interiorized as personal virtues. Workers come to measure themselves through ratings, scores, rankings, and patterns of demand, interpreting algorithmically mediated exposure as a reflection of individual merit rather than as the effect of a wider architecture of control. Studies on platform work have emphasized how such systems intensify uncertainty while individualizing its management, compelling workers to narrate themselves as adaptable, entrepreneurial, and permanently improvable subjects (Fernández-Macías et al., 2023). Ritzer's (2020) account of digital rationalization is especially illuminating here: metricization and standardization do not suppress individuality outright, but recode it into measurable performance. In an access-based social order, as Rifkin (2000) suggested, participation itself becomes conditional upon continuous connectivity and self-adjustment. The pedagogy of the platform is therefore diffuse and tacit: it teaches workers how to understand themselves without ever declaring its curriculum.

For this reason, such pedagogy cannot be regarded as neutral. Its formative power is structured by asymmetries that remain largely inaccessible to those subjected to them. Workers are encouraged to adapt to evaluative regimes they do not design, cannot fully inspect, and are often unable to contest. Opaque criteria, unilateral rule modifications, reputational dependence, and gamified incentives orient conduct while concealing relations of subordination beneath the rhetoric of flexibility and autonomy. What appears as choice is frequently a highly managed field of constrained adaptation. In this sense, the platform economy radicalizes broader neoliberal educational logics in which responsabilization displaces structural critique and competition is naturalized as a horizon of self-formation (Apple; Kenway; Singh, 2005; Díez Gutiérrez, 2010). As recent European evidence indicates, algorithmic management does not merely supervise labor; it also legitimizes obedience by translating control into performance optimization (Eurofound, 2024a).

If platforms function as pedagogical environments, then a critical response to the gig economy cannot limit itself to questions of legal classification or market efficiency. It must also ask what kinds of workers, dispositions, and expectations are being produced within these environments. The issue is not only how labor is organized, but how subjects are formed to inhabit insecurity as normality. At this point, the analysis must deepen:

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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understanding platform work pedagogically requires a broader theoretical account of instability, digital mediation, and dignity — one that can illuminate the human consequences of this new labor regime.

Re-reading Bauman, Rifkin, and Méda for the European gig economy

The gig economy in the European Union can be interpreted more adequately if the conceptual vocabulary developed in earlier diagnoses of labor instability is not abandoned, but reworked. In this sense, Bauman, Rifkin, and Méda are useful not as isolated authorities to be restated, but as complementary perspectives through which platform labor may be reconstructed in its contemporary specificity. Their relevance lies precisely in the fact that they help move beyond a merely descriptive account of apps, tasks, and regulation toward a deeper understanding of what has happened to work under conditions of digital mediation. The crisis-of-work framework therefore remains valuable, but only if it is rearticulated in relation to a platformized labor order (Bauman, 2000; Rifkin, 2004; Méda, 2010).

Bauman is indispensable for grasping the liquidity of platform labor. If liquid modernity names a condition in which permanence gives way to volatility, then gig work appears as one of its most coherent labor expressions. Here, labor is continuously interruptible, reputationally exposed, and structurally reversible: access to tasks depends on ratings, visibility, and demand fluctuations rather than on durable institutional inclusion. The worker occupies a space of permanent replaceability, where insecurity is not an exception but the governing principle of participation. In this environment, identity itself becomes fragile, because occupational continuity no longer provides a stable horizon through which one can narrate a coherent relation to work (Bauman, 2000). Bauman's reflections on work, consumerism, and the new poor sharpen this reading by showing how evaluation increasingly takes the form of market-like selection, rendering individuals valuable only insofar as they remain continuously performative and desirable (Bauman, 2005a). Even the ethical dimension of labor is affected: where relations are mediated by ratings, speed, and permanent competition, reciprocity weakens, and the conditions for shared responsibility become more precarious (Bauman, 1993).

Yet Bauman alone does not explain the technical architecture through which this instability is now organized. For that, Rifkin remains particularly illuminating. His analyses of the age of access and of the technological restructuring of work help situate platform labor within a broader transition toward networked coordination, digitally mediated participation, and the reorganization of economic life around connectivity rather than possession (Rifkin, 2000). From this perspective, the gig economy is not simply precarious labor in updated form; it is labor embedded in infrastructures that govern access to work through interfaces, data flows, and on-demand matching. What is transformed is not only the quantity of work available, but the very conditions under which work is entered, distributed, and made socially legible. Rifkin's account of the end of work is equally relevant here, though not because platform labor signifies the disappearance of labor as such. Rather, it shows how

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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technological change displaces inherited institutional mediations and demands new forms of adaptability, responsiveness, and self-management from workers whose participation is increasingly conditioned by digital systems rather than by stable organizational belonging (Rifkin, 2004).

If Bauman clarifies instability and Rifkin clarifies mediation, Méda introduces the necessary normative tension. Her work prevents the analysis from remaining confined to the diagnosis of fragmentation and technological change by asking what kind of social value can still be attributed to work under such conditions. Méda's critique of work-centered society is especially pertinent in the platform economy, where labor is often celebrated in the language of flexibility and opportunity while simultaneously losing many of the features that historically made it a source of dignity, recognition, and social integration (Méda, 2008). If work becomes episodic, individualized, and subordinated to algorithmic evaluation, its function as a basis for citizenship and collective belonging becomes uncertain. Méda's reflections therefore compel a more demanding question: is the task merely to adapt workers to new labor formats, or must one also reconsider the place assigned to work within contemporary society itself (Méda, 2010)? In this respect, her perspective opens a necessary distance from productivist assumptions and resonates, albeit from a different angle, with broader reflections on the redistribution of work and time advanced by authors such as De Masi (2017).

Taken together, these three perspectives illuminate different dimensions of the same historical transformation. Bauman explains the fragility, reversibility, and existential insecurity of platformized labor; Rifkin elucidates its technical mediation and infrastructural reorganization; Méda reveals the normative stakes involved in asking whether such labor can still sustain dignity, recognition, and social meaning (Bauman, 2000; Rifkin, 2000; Méda, 2010). Their convergence makes it possible to understand the gig economy not as a narrow labor-market anomaly, but as a phenomenon that is simultaneously economic, technological, anthropological, and political.

Seen in this light, platform labor cannot be addressed solely as a question of regulation, efficiency, or employment status. If gig work destabilizes identity, reorganizes access through digital infrastructures, and weakens the dignifying function traditionally associated with work, then the pedagogical problem becomes unavoidable. The issue is no longer whether workers can simply adapt to a new environment, but how formation itself must be rethought under conditions in which insecurity is normalized and participation is technologically filtered. Méda's critique of the social centrality of work and Bauman's diagnosis of individualized precariousness thus converge in indicating that pedagogy should not merely accompany adjustment, but interrogate the human consequences of this labor order (Méda, 2010; Bauman, 2005a). At this point, the discussion can move from theoretical reinterpretation to a more explicitly programmatic question: what would a pedagogy of platform work in the European Union require?

Toward a pedagogy of platform work in the European Union

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54372/pc.2026.v.22.4064>

If platform labor reorganizes work at once economically, technologically, and subjectively, pedagogy cannot remain external to the problem. The issue is not to devise a merely technical training scheme for platform workers, still less to translate precarious adaptability into a new educational ideal. Rather, what is required is a pedagogy of platform work capable of reconnecting formation with dignity, rights, critical agency, and democratic participation. Within the pedagogy-of-work tradition, education has never concerned only occupational insertion; it has also concerned the meaning of work in human development and social life (Alessandrini, 2012; Palma, 2018). For that very reason, the transformations produced by platform capitalism demand not pedagogical neutrality, but constructive re-elaboration (Cegolon, 2020a).

A first dimension of such a pedagogy concerns education on labor rights and institutional protections. In the platform economy, contractual ambiguity and digital intermediation frequently obscure the worker's status, making it more difficult to recognize dependency, identify rights, and claim protection. Under these conditions, rights-awareness is not external to formation; it is one of its constitutive elements. A pedagogy of platform work should therefore help workers understand the institutional frameworks that shape employment classification, social protection, algorithmic oversight, and avenues of redress. In the European Union, where platform work has become a central site of regulatory renegotiation, this formative dimension acquires particular relevance (European Union, 2024; Eurofound, 2024b). The point is not to convert pedagogy into legal doctrine, but to ensure that educational practice enables workers to interpret their own condition within a field of rights, obligations, and emerging protections (European Parliament, 2025; Fredman et al., 2025).

A second dimension is critical digital literacy. Platform workers require more than operational competence in using apps, interfaces, and communication tools. They need the capacity to understand how algorithmic systems classify, evaluate, and govern labor, how data are extracted and mobilized, and how automated decisions affect visibility, opportunity, and income. Without such literacy, workers remain exposed to systems they must obey but cannot decipher. Recent research has made clear that algorithmic management shapes labor through continuous monitoring, ranking, and behavioral steering, often under conditions of limited transparency (European Commission JRC, 2025; Eurofound, 2024a). For this reason, digital competence should not be reduced to employability alone. It must include a critical grasp of platform governance and datafication as conditions of agency (Milanez; Lemmens; Ruggiu, 2025; Mendoza-Chan; Pee, 2024).

Yet no pedagogy of platform work can remain confined to the individual subject. Platform capitalism intensifies isolation, competition, and responsabilization, encouraging workers to experience insecurity as a private burden rather than as a shared structural condition. Countering this hyper-individualization is itself an educational task. A critical pedagogy of work must cultivate solidarity, associational imagination, and the capacity to recognize common interests across fragmented labor experiences. In this respect, the pedagogical problem is inseparable from the public dimension of education emphasized by Giroux (2003), as well as from emancipatory approaches that understand labor formation as linked

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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to collective consciousness rather than mere adjustment (Souza, 2022). Contemporary developments in collective bargaining and collective action within platform work confirm that education for solidarity is not abstractly moralistic; it is materially connected to the possibility of organization and voice (Forsyth; McCrystal, 2025).

Beyond individual empowerment and even beyond solidarity-building, pedagogy should also prepare workers for democratic participation in the governance of digital labor. This means developing the capacity to understand how rules, datasets, evaluative criteria, and algorithmic procedures are constructed, challenged, and potentially transformed. If platform labor is governed through infrastructures that increasingly mediate access to work, then democratic agency must include the ability to intervene in the conditions of such mediation. In the European context, where questions of algorithmic transparency, working conditions, and platform accountability are under active debate, pedagogy becomes one dimension of democratic citizenship in the digital workplace (European Union, 2024; European Parliament, 2025; ILO, 2024).

At the same time, any pedagogical proposal that aspires to seriousness must confront inequality directly. Platform labor does not affect all workers in the same way. Migrant, racialized, linguistically marginalized, and otherwise vulnerable workers often occupy the most precarious segments of the platform economy, facing heightened dependency, weaker bargaining power, and greater exposure to invisibility and risk. For this reason, pedagogy cannot be abstractly universal. It must remain centered on the person in his or her situated vulnerability, attentive to unequal starting conditions and differentiated forms of exclusion (Manici, 2022). Recent international and European analyses show that vulnerability in platform work is structured by broader inequalities rather than merely individual deficits (ILO, 2024; Eurofound, 2024a). A pedagogy of platform work must therefore be inclusive in a substantive sense, not only in formal rhetoric (Fredman et al., 2025).

This also requires redefining resilience. In the context of platform labor, resilience cannot mean passive adaptability to instability, nor the individualized ability to endure precarious conditions indefinitely. Such a notion would simply reproduce the neoliberal grammar of responsabilization. Within the pedagogy-of-work tradition, however, resilience can be rethought as a critical capacity linked to dignity, reflexivity, and collective support (Alessandrini, 2004; Alessandrini, 2012). It is not the art of surviving any labor condition whatsoever, but the capacity to act within and against precarious structures while preserving agency and social meaning. In this sense, the reflections of Cegolon (2020b) and Pignalberi (2020) are particularly useful, because they help distinguish between employability as mere adaptation and formation as the development of critical, relational, and ethically grounded subjectivity.

Taken together, these dimensions suggest that pedagogy is not ancillary to regulation, but part of a broader democratic response to platform capitalism in Europe. A pedagogy of platform work would not replace institutional reform; it would help render such reform socially intelligible, critically appropriate, and humanly meaningful. In this respect, the

Gig Economy and the European Union: From the Pedagogy of Work to a Pedagogy of Platform Work

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pedagogy-of-work tradition retains its relevance precisely because it can move from diagnosis to reconstruction without losing its critical orientation (Cegolon, 2020a; Alessandrini, 2012). From here, the argument can be condensed in more synthetic form in the final considerations.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The argument developed in this article has sought to show that the gig economy in the European Union cannot be reduced to a transformation in employment relations, regulatory categories, or digital business models alone. What is at stake is a more profound mutation in the meaning of work itself: in the ways labor is experienced, interpreted, and socially mediated under conditions of platformization. For this reason, the European debate on platform work, while indispensable, should be read not only through the language of classification and protection, but also through the broader question of how digital mediation redefines the formative and human dimensions of labor (European Union, 2024; ILO, 2024). The passage from platform precarity to pedagogical reflection is therefore not ancillary to the topic; it is one of its most consequential implications.

From this perspective, one of the article's main theoretical claims has been that the crisis of work has assumed a more specific historical form: the platformization of work. This shift matters because instability is no longer expressed solely through unemployment or the decline of stable careers, but through a labor regime in which discontinuity, reputational dependence, and algorithmic visibility become normal conditions of participation. Under such circumstances, the question of work cannot be separated from the question of subjectivity, nor can labor be understood without considering the ethical texture of relations it enables or corrodes. Bauman's concern with fragilized reciprocity and moral distance remains pertinent here, because platformized labor risks normalizing forms of social connection that are functional yet weakly reciprocal (Bauman, 1993). At the same time, Méda's critique retains its full force: if work becomes increasingly fragmented and instrumentalized, its capacity to sustain dignity, recognition, and meaningful integration into collective life becomes deeply uncertain (Méda, 2010).

The pedagogical consequence of this diagnosis is decisive. The pedagogy of work cannot respond to the gig economy by refining the worker's capacity to adapt more efficiently to precarious flexibility. Such an approach would merely educationalize insecurity. What is required instead is a pedagogy capable of forming reflective, rights-bearing, critically literate, and socially connected subjects. This implies, as argued above, education in rights-awareness, critical digital literacy regarding algorithmic systems, and the cultivation of solidaristic capacities capable of resisting hyper-individualization. It also requires a person-centered attentiveness to unequal vulnerability, since platform labor affects workers differently depending on their legal, linguistic, social, and economic position (Manici, 2022). In this sense, the pedagogy of platform work must remain both emancipatory and concrete, close to the Freirean horizon of critical formation recalled by

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Souza (2022), and responsive to the contemporary decent-work concerns emphasized by the ILO (2024).

For the same reason, the future of platform work in Europe cannot be entrusted exclusively to technological redesign or juridical refinement. Regulation matters, but it is not sufficient on its own. Workers must also be enabled to understand, contest, and help reshape the conditions under which digital labor is governed. The pedagogical dimension is therefore inseparable from democratic and collective horizons: from worker voice, collective organization, fair representation, and participation in the governance of platformized labor relations. Recent reflections on collective bargaining and fair work in the platform economy suggest precisely that the struggle over platform labor is not only about contractual status, but about the institutional and democratic conditions of worker agency (Forsyth; McCrystal, 2025; Fredman et al., 2025). In the European Union, where such questions are increasingly visible within the public and regulatory sphere, pedagogy should be seen as one component of a broader democratic response to platform capitalism (European Union, 2024).

Ultimately, to rethink work pedagogically in the age of platforms is also to reopen a wider question about the kind of society being formed through digital labor. It means asking whether flexibility should remain the dominant moral vocabulary of contemporary work, or whether dignity, time, and social belonging ought to be reclaimed as equally central categories. In this broader sense, the pedagogy of platform work belongs to a larger effort to imagine forms of labor and life not exhausted by performance, availability, and permanent adaptation (De Masi, 2017; Méda, 2010).

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