

**Call for multidisciplinary contributions on:
“Collaborative economy and social protection”
For the April-June 2018 issue**

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This call for contributions is addressed to researchers in philosophy, political science, history, law, economics, management, sociology, and psychology as well as to actors in the field of social protection.

Articles are due by **15 October 2017**

[H1]General Introduction

New practices in production, consumption, and financing, which concern even the private ownership of durable goods, have developed over the last decade. This has been associated with the multiplication of internet platforms linking suppliers and clients, either directly or through a commercial enterprise. The growth of these new trading modalities since the 2008 economic crisis has intensified due to the reduction in household purchasing power (which encourages discovering new resources from personal property by directly or indirectly increasing its value), rising unemployment (which favours self-employment), and renewed interest in finding alternatives (such as exchanging services) in the face of an economic model in difficulty.

[H2]Multiple Purposes

It is not easy to identify the common threads of this nebulous set of activities, which are related to internet development. This is reflected in its still fluctuating designation, the various elements sometimes being grouped together under the term “the collaborative economy”. Thus, in order to differentiate the core of the collaborative economy from what one might consider to be a simple

deviation, some authors speak of a *platform economy* to designate activities (such as Uber) which, apart from relying on an internet application for connecting clients and service providers, maintains mainly capitalist market aims. They reserve the term *collaborative economy* for production or consumption activities involving a sharing of values (ecological concerns, solidarity society, production of common goods, etc.) (Lallemand, 2016). For others, the term “collaborative economy” is an encompassing one, designating a common characteristic of these activities which is to be built on networks of individuals and communities connected to each other, where the notion of decentralization (“peer to peer” relations) becomes crucial. In this context, this new form of economy encompasses a broad range of activities with different purposes, widening the sphere of the “collaborative economy” to that of the social and solidarity economy (the elements of ecology and voluntary work) and the commons (the shared management of a resource). However, the objectives of the activities permitted by digital platforms are in many respects varied and difficult to identify, as are the so-called sharing platforms (private property leased or lent to other users) or the exchange of services (jobbing platforms). The objective of optimizing the existing resource with an ecological concern for reduced consumption can be counterbalanced by monetary considerations and a rational calculation of cost amortization.

Beyond the aims and purposes of the “collaborative economy” lies a profound change in the economic model, transforming the basis of economic value. Thus, for Rifkin (Rifkin, 2014), we may have entered the era of marginal zero cost (and zero price), marking the end of capitalist profit and the advent of a shared management of goods, which would thus become “common”. Collaborative consumption leads to a more rapid return on assets. The availability of knowledge on platforms competes with ordinary companies and modifies the functioning of markets. In many fields, particularly in personal services, the porous boundary between voluntary work and semi-professional and salaried activity modifies the very concept of wealth: it becomes a social utility, a service essentially given rather than its commercial valorisation. In this context, social protection is no longer directly tied to the individual’s income and based on wage-related social contributions but would require thinking out other solidarity mechanisms. Does this thesis push the analysis of existing reality to the extreme or is it based on unfounded speculation?

[H2]A peripheral movement within a broader global recomposition?

The long transformation of the labour market and of models of work organization (franchising, subcontracting, umbrella company, self-employment, and intermittent work) in which the economy is based on new computer technologies, leads to considering social protection in the framework of broader economic and social developments. The increase in the share of non-salaried work since the beginning of the 21st century (favoured by the creation of the status of self-employed in 2009) can certainly be interpreted as a reaction to mass unemployment. But it also demonstrates a logic of integration into a different type of employment in which the historical solidarity linked to wage-earning cannot be reproduced in the same way. Even if the economy linked to internet platforms occupies a marginal place in self-employment at the moment (Askénazy, 2016), it seems to be experiencing rapid growth (IGAS data, 2015). This is precisely one of the points which needs to be clarified: the marginal and peripheral dimension of

these new forms of hybrid employment versus their participation in a fundamental structuring movement with its characteristic dynamics.

The social goals—“values” or individual motivations—put forward in the sphere of the “collaborative economy” raise questions concerning individual positions and their relation to solidarity links on the basis of social protection, at least in its insurance logic. If we take the Castelian perspective, the long-term development of social protection is based on the creation of a collective property, “social property”, based on work and wage solidarity. Financing public services and social security benefits ensures the least dependence of the worker on the labour market but also the social interdependence at the basis of society.

For R. Castel, social ownership has already been called into question by the introduction of the logic of assistance, notably in the name of the fight against poverty, since it broke the link between the right to benefits and wage solidarity. So-called collaborative activities seem to be based on a logic which differs from traditional wage-earning, both because of the status of the persons involved and also by the mode of production of surplus value.

Contributions can be grouped around three axes in order to develop both theoretical and empirical analyses involving different disciplines (philosophy and political science, history and law, economics and management, sociology, and psychology) examining the “collaborative economy” from the point of view of social protection. This can be done from the perspective of the renewal / undermining of the foundations of collective solidarity and the current institutional forms, as from the expectations, representations, and practices of the individuals already involved. These three axes are mentioned separately in order to underline the particular clarification that each of them provides. Of course, contributions may combine them to highlight their interactions.

[H3]1. The growing complexity of risks

A first point will be to question the scale and meaning of the collaborative economy’s role in the transformations under way. Should we see this as a new form of organization of labour and market regulation on the societal level, transforming the conception of the production and sharing of its wealth? Would such a perspective reconsider and strengthen the values of social utility and collective ownership in contrast to the dominant logic of capitalist accumulation? This concerns the economic model of the collaborative economy and deciding whether or not it contributes to establishing new social ties and new solidarities anchored in a social economy of solidarity or even in an extension of the non-market sphere and of voluntary activity. Or does it represent the increasing commodification of the economy through excessive valorisation of goods by individuals, social dumping for jobbing platforms, etc.? Individual motivations and “values” can then be mobilized to understand the undoubtedly contradictory logic that is at work.

This uncertainty about the scope of the ongoing social transformation is reflected in the stability of individuals’ integration into employment and the protections that are attached to it. Should income from activities related to the collaborative economy and the permeability of statutes be considered only a reflection of a certain “immaturity” of new activities whose organizational forms, registration in law, and protections will normalize over time? In this case, problems

related to social protection are linked to the heterogeneity of employment statuses, raising the question of global regulation. On the other hand, if one considers that this is a fundamental trend, it becomes necessary to rethink labour regulations and the associated social protections. From a general point of view, increased employment instability and truncated careers lead to a reconsideration of the time horizon and an approach to activity circumscribed by social protection. Thus, reflections on social drawing rights and the possibility of deferred rights look to organizing career security. Similarly, the intermittent work regime that has developed in the particular sector of the performing arts is intended to cover design, preparation, and dissemination activities that develop both upstream and downstream of paid work *stricto sensu*, paid at a fixed rate. The legal regime of mutual assistance provided for in the rural code could also be examined to cover exchange of services in an agricultural environment. Finally, have individuals themselves—in response to the precariousness of the labour market and anticipated diminished rights—begun to replace a logic of solidarity linked to wage labour by a return to 19th century forms of individual and capitalist pensions, in the sense of Castel’s long history of social protection? Supported by public incentives through tax relief or loan subsidies, for example, these forms maintain individual savings that can be mobilized in the short or long term to deal with inadequately covered social risks due to involvement in non-standard activities.

[H3]2. Activity status and institutional forms of social protection

A second axis might bring together contributions on the challenges posed to labour law and social protection by the varied statuses of workers involved in the “collaborative economy”. Beyond the fundamental divergences of society to which these activities lead, one of their common features is that they reinforce and rely on forms of employment and status on the margins of traditional wage-earning and on a lack of clarity on the distinctions between professional and amateur activity. Moreover, while income is generally derived from the work done, it might also be income from capital resulting from the provision of goods (a car, housing, etc.). Finally, they are characterized by the fact that a single individual can have several statuses because of the variety of his activities. As highlighted in the IGAS report on collaborative platforms, these are complex economic and legal entities that blur many boundaries (IGAS, 2016).

A first ill-defined frontier concerns the distinction between self-employment and traditional wage labour. As illustrated by the first movement of chauffeured car service [VTC - *voiture de transport avec chauffeur*] drivers demanding a rate increase from the platform operating company, the status of these “independent” workers is ambiguous and there is a possibility of them being reclassified as salaried contract workers, as was the case for Uber. Should these new forms of employment lead to rethinking the usual criteria of subordination and the notion of dependency? Another frontier brought into question is that between professional and non-professional activity. In the case of “collaborative” production, for example (carpooling, sharing goods, etc.), the resources generated by the activity may constitute a non-negligible part of an individual’s income. Thus, from these two examples, it appears that the problems of hidden work, disguised subordination, and concealment of incomes are growing in importance.

The authorities have taken up this question from the point of view of the legal status of these job-creating activities, bringing to mind the problems of the right to protection of personal data and of property rights. This is done with a concern for both the social protection of the workers and the financial losses for fiscal and social accounts (Haut conseil du financement de la protection sociale, 2017). Draft regulations have been proposed to this effect (IGAS, 2016). While recognizing that the development of these activities on a new scale makes it more difficult for the state to implement affiliation criteria and legal rules, it is above all a matter of aligning individual situations with known categories. Thus, a level of revenue or a frequency of activity would imply a presumption of professional activity and of the obligation to join a social protection scheme. Similarly, the determination of the status of self-employed or salaried worker should make it possible to decide on the application of either commercial or labour law and on the applicable rules of social protection.

However, these blurred boundaries of professional status and activities should lead us to deeper analysis of the transformations of forms of solidarity and redistribution mechanisms on the basis of social protection. To what degree is the extension of the current protection system to less well-covered categories (independent workers, often without unemployment protection and complementary health insurance, and the self-employed) a response to these new forms of employment or rather to new independent workers who are economically dependent? Foreign experiences in which legislation has introduced intermediary contracts between the status of employee and that of self-employed (as in Italy) can provide interesting insights into the reconfigurations of the social protection of workers to which these developments have led. On the other hand, the hypothesis of the profound transformation of the economic model (social utility, multiple use of goods, etc.) (HCFPS, 2016) raises the question of the need to revise the link between social protection and employment status, uncoupling the link between social contributions and benefits (not only for health and family benefits but also for unemployment, work accidents, etc.), leading to universal social protection. Debates on universal income have highlighted the link between the “collaborative economy” and the move towards universal social protection, often justified by changes in market and non-market labour. Some activities related to the production of common goods and services (free software, volunteer work) have been justified on the basis of universal income. The risk of an evolution towards a Beveridgian model with reduced public coverage, leaving more room for the private insurance sector, or to the individual patrimonial dimension, then appears as the reverse side of this evolution. This would lead to a scenario focusing on the poorest (safety net). Finally, the question of the emergence of a new logic of solidarity going beyond the family sphere and based on organized volunteering through structured networking (field of care) or other systems of local solidarity (LETS-local exchange trading system, etc.), can be posited as being a diversification of social protection beyond the public forms instituted.

[H3]3. Population: Uses, Perceptions and Representations

Qualitative studies concerning the populations involved point to important issues in addition to general questions and analyses of the principles and institutional arrangements that form and organise the social protection of a wide range of activities in the field of “collaborative

economics”. These cover both the uses of the institutional framework due to public intervention and the individual representation of the expected forms of solidarity and protection.

Two non-exclusive tracks can be sketched mobilizing empirical works of sociology or psychosociology going beyond the simple description of the heterogeneity of the populations concerned and their professional and social trajectories. In the first perspective, the particular conditions of activity in the context of the “collaborative economy” undoubtedly create tensions between a concern for distinction and a concern for protection, which marked the social protection of independent workers (Bruno, 2016). On the one hand, autonomy and individual responsibility, both authorized and obligatory, are often highlighted in the collaborative framework and can shed light on perceptions of property-based protection or forms of voluntary, professional-based insurance. On the other hand, the weakness and irregularity of resources derived from activity, the variety of statuses that must sometimes be combined, the existence of unpaid tasks, etc., may lead to expectations of more universal forms of social protection. The way in which mobility and career paths are experienced is also a way of approaching the issue of perceptions and representations of social protection. Similarly, the examination of reports to institutions managing social rights could shed light not only on the knowledge of rights and the phenomenon of non-recourse but also on the forms of membership or withdrawal from the established rules of collective solidarity.

In a second perspective, going beyond an approach based on individual perceptions, it would be of interest to present studies analysing social movements that have developed in the various fields of the collaborative economy. Through the concrete demands that are expressed, it would be useful to have better identification of the type of social protection that is sought: reference to the salaried model, to more or less socialized forms of social protection, or to universal public modes.

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