

Article

Identities and Precariousness in the Collaborative Economy, Neither Wage-Earner, nor Self-Employed: Emergence and Consolidation of the *Homo Rider*, a Case Study

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Abstract: In recent years, courier and home delivery services have experienced extensive growth around the world. These platform companies, that operate through applications on smartphones, have experienced the benefits of the technological leap that has been produced by the conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions on traditional commerce. This business model integrates novel elements that move away from a classic contractual relationship, employer-employee. They combine a strong cooperative culture, integrated by company values and principles that make the rider assume an identity that defines him/her as a worker and a member of a community. In addition, on the other hand, precarious working conditions, in which extreme competitiveness among colleagues and dependence on high standards of service compliance are encouraged. In Spain, there is a lack of research on the identity of workers in this type of platform. By means of in-depth interviews with drivers of two different companies in the Region of Murcia (Spain), the main objective of this article is to identify and describe the figure of what we define as *homo rider*, understood as a prototype individual in the context of contemporary labor relations, linked to the incorporation of new technologies for the intermediation and interconnection between people, goods and services. We approach to the socioeconomic spectrum and identity imaginary of the *homo rider* through two dimensions, material and ideological, to construct this broad, ambiguous figure between self-employment and wage-earner that would also represent a complex relation between precarious work and new technologies.

Keywords: gig economy; precariat; fake freelancing; *homo rider*; ethnography

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1. Introduction

In the context of contemporary labor relations, the incorporation of new technologies in the workplace, as well as the emergence of new jobs in productive sectors based on the use of these technologies, are having a great impact. In this scenario of potentialities and risks, it becomes necessary to analyze the impact of automation and digitalization in the context of labor relations. Specifically, we refer to the work carried out through platforms that serve as intermediaries between individuals who offer goods and services and those who demand them.

In this context, we should differentiate between two profiles of individuals linked to work in platforms. On the one hand, we may point out a profile with a medium or higher qualification, engaged in tasks related to engineering, translation or graphic design. On the other hand, there is the profile of what we have agreed to call *homo rider*, which is linked to home delivery platforms [1]. This second profile has a number of characteristics that significantly differentiate it from the first: it involves tasks that are usually combined

with other jobs, performed mainly by men, young people and, in some cases, with an immigration profile [2].

In the last few years, Spain have been marked by the growth of home delivery platforms. In fact, it ranks as the European Union country with the highest percentage of people who have provided a service and obtained an income through a digital platform [3]. Until the implementation of Royal Decree-Law September 2021, of 11 May, which amends the revised text of the Workers' Statute Law to guarantee the labor rights of people dedicated to delivery within the scope of digital platforms, delivery drivers or riders were an anomalous figure since these platform companies recognized these workers as independent collaborators. The figure of the rider was shaped by an unclear legal-labor situation and a great ideological influence that linked their productivity to the figure of the entrepreneur or partner, not as a subordinate. Hence, one of the greatest successes of these companies has been to instill in workers a corporate identity that encourages productivity and competitiveness. This is a game of double narrative played by these companies. On the one hand, they pretend to recognize riders as collaborators, and therefore without offering them the legal and economic coverage of an employee. At the same time, they reproduce a discourse that tries to link riders to their company culture, always appealing to the flexibility and agility of being part of their workforce.

Therefore, in the Spanish regulatory framework, this phenomenon of platform work has been dealt with in an exceptional manner, since once the jurisprudence was issued, which finally recognized riders as dependent workers, a process of social dialogue was opened, with the participation of the government, unions and companies. To date, this is the first country in the world to draft a regulation of this phenomenon as a result of social dialogue. However, it should be noted that this is a limited regulation, since it refers to a part of this type of platform, i.e., those that localize work: delivery and transport platforms, which are a part of this type of platform [4].

Additionally, there are few studies that address the perception that riders have of their condition as platform workers. Along with the material analysis, that is, considering the normative and economic aspects of this social phenomenon, it is of interest to understand what the rider's self-perception is similar to, what strategies they develop, how they perceive individually and collectively this recent phenomenon that affects contemporary labor relations. In short, to try to draw a paradigmatic profile that helps to interpret with appropriate methodological tools this figure linked to Industry 4.0. With this in mind, fieldwork is carried out in the form of an ethnography that seeks to understand how riders perceive their activity. In order to analyze the different discourses that are governed during the fieldwork, a series of dimensions are proposed and, broadly speaking, a distinction is made between material and ideological dimensions.

Therefore, this paper starts from the theoretical conception of the identity of delivery workers in collaborative economy companies, closely linked to labor culture, neoliberal thinking and digital capitalism. This identity is studied on its dynamic aspect and the confluence of different actors in its construction. This theoretical framework allows to be operationalized and to make an exploratory approach to the current processes of social construction of the rider's identity, using various theories and sources of information. One of the theoretical proposals offered is the analysis from the theory of ways of life, an approach that allows to analyze the existence of different labor cultures in a given society. This is a proposal that makes it possible to analyze the context of labor relations from a socio-anthropological perspective, taking into account aspects such as identity, self-perception and the end-means relationship that different individuals of the same labor group would carry out [5–7].

The methodology used allows us to collect the discourses and opinions of the different workers involved in this process, whether from a quantitative approach -through statistical data-, a qualitative one -through interviews with professionals-, or through the analysis of works carried out in Spain on the reality of these workers. In order to establish categories and analyze the different dimensions to organize the structure of the interviews, we used

MaxQda program. We must point out that we are aware that the 10 interviews offered may seem insufficient, so we understand this article as a first approach to this social phenomenon. It would be a pilot proposal that would allow us to know the discourses of a sample of riders, of different genders, age groups, level of studies and means of transport used, in order to reach some initial conclusions.

In this way, this study would be based on four propositions that guide the approach to the social construction of the rider's identity:

- (a) The close relationship between the concepts of work culture and identity;
- (b) The distinction and linkage between individual and collective identities;
- (c) The dynamic aspect of the rider labor market in the platform economy;
- (d) Coexistence of different actors in the social construction of identity.

Therefore, in general terms, in this article we are interested in knowing how to identify the figure of what we call *homo rider*, understood as a prototype product of the context of contemporary labor relations, linked to the incorporation of new technologies for the intermediation and interconnection between people, goods and services. Through the fieldwork carried out, we try to analyze the two dimensions that we propose, material and ideological, and thus try to infer the common characteristics among the different subjects interviewed. In the same way, it is a matter of collecting differences, and thus being able to construct this broad, ambiguous figure between self-employment and salaried work that would represent a prototype that would speak to us of precarious work and new technologies.

The following sections offer the main results obtained, preceded by a theoretical approach to the concept of identity and a detailed explanation of the methodological strategy. The results are developed differentiating the contributions to the social construction of the identity of the rider and other social agents.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section offers a theoretical approach to the main concepts considered in the research. Firstly, it is described the implementation of flexibility and precariousness in the labor market. Secondly, it is explained the appearance of digital labor platforms in IV Industrial Revolution and its consequences on workers' working and living conditions. Finally, it is considered the new platform workers' identity in the collaborative economy.

2.1. Flexibility as a Product of Globalization and Postmodernity

The reappearance and significant implementation of flexibility in the productive sphere and the organization of work occurred after the breakdown of the social norm of stable employment in the 1970s [8,9]. Since that time, flexibility, which emerged as "a requirement of macroeconomic adjustment and as an instrument of economic policies to deal with situations of mass unemployment with inflation" in the aforementioned historical period [10], can be understood as the form of both quantitative and qualitative adaptation of the organization of the productive system, the organization of work, as well as the workers themselves to variations in demand in a changing environment [11–14]. It took different forms, such as external ones, including outsourcing and decentralization, and internal ones, including numerical, wage and functional ones.

Flexibility initially re-emerged in the productive sphere, although companies soon transferred the uncertainty, they were enduring to the labor sphere. Thus, it was the workers who suffered the reintroduction of flexibility in the labor market [15], which became its main characteristic. Its resurgence coincided with the emergence of a set of new technologies that gave rise to the so-called informational [16] or information society [17,18] along with the III Industrial Revolution [19,20]. Both, the new social and industrial or organizational forms of work were based on information considered as raw material and on new technologies not so much as tools but as processes to be developed [16].

The consequences caused by the reintroduction of flexibility in the labor market in the last decades of the 20th century were, among others, labor deregulation, with the

worsening of workers' working conditions [21–23], favored by the public labor market policies designed and implemented by the different administrations in charge [21,24,25], demonstrating the existence of close relationships between economic and political and socio-cultural factors [26]; instability, with the destabilization of workers who had developed their working careers within the social norm of stable employment [27–29] and the proliferation of so-called atypical jobs [22,23,30]; and, therefore, precariousness, with the loss of control by the worker of his own working career and life trajectory [31], which is exploited as a molding and regulating factor of workers' lives, as well as a disciplinary instrument for them [32].

In recent decades, and already with the IV Industrial Revolution [20] underway, we have witnessed a process of extension and intensification of labor precariousness [33]. A highly influential factor in this process has been the development of a series of technologies that have brought about the most rapid, intense [34,35] and widespread [36] technological change of those produced so far [19,37].

2.2. New Technologies and Industry 4.0. The Origin of Work through Digital Platforms

The new technologies inherent to the IV Industrial Revolution have led to both qualitative and quantitative changes in the labor market. In relation to the latter, we can speak of automation, understood as the process in which automatic procedures applied to the production of goods and services are used [38–40]. This has led to a serious transformation of jobs and occupations, as well as their number. Frey and Osborne [40], followed by various research applied to other contexts [41,42], consider that automation will generate a process of substitution of workers employed in both routine and non-routine tasks, despite the existence of technological 'bottlenecks'; their predictions speak of the substitution of up to almost half of total employment in the case of the United States. On the other hand, Autor et al. [43] and Autor [44], followed by other researches [45–48], point out the importance of considering tasks rather than occupations, so they conclude that the replacement of workers by automated processes will be confined to routine tasks so that there will not be a massive replacement, but there will be a transformation of the nature of occupations and jobs.

In relation to the qualitative changes that the application of the new technologies inherent to the IV Industrial Revolution have brought about in the labor market, it is worth considering the significant degree of responsibility that the development of the collaborative economy, the so-called Gig Economy or economy of odd jobs in which there are "sporadic jobs whose transaction is done through the digital market" [49] and, of course, digital platforms have had. These are understood as digital infrastructures that make possible the interaction between two or more groups, acting as intermediaries for different users such as customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers and others, even offering the tools for these users to generate their own products and/or services [29,50]. Digital platforms that are used in the workplace are considered as those businesses that "create an internal market that allows connecting workers with consumers for the provision of services" [2].

The large number of digital labor platforms currently in existence can be classified in different ways according to the categorization criteria used. Thus, an analysis by Eurofound [51] classifies platforms according to the criteria of the level of skills of workers, the format of service provision, the size of the tasks, the selector of services or tasks and, finally, the form of mediation between worker and client. On the other hand, the International Labor Organization [52], following the classification made by Schmidt [53], points out as classification criteria the way in which the service is deployed (web or online and in-person or offline) as well as the assignment of tasks (individuals or groups of people). As can be seen in Figure 1, one has web-based platforms, whereby workers perform tasks online or remotely, and location-based platforms, whereby workers custom perform tasks in specific locations.

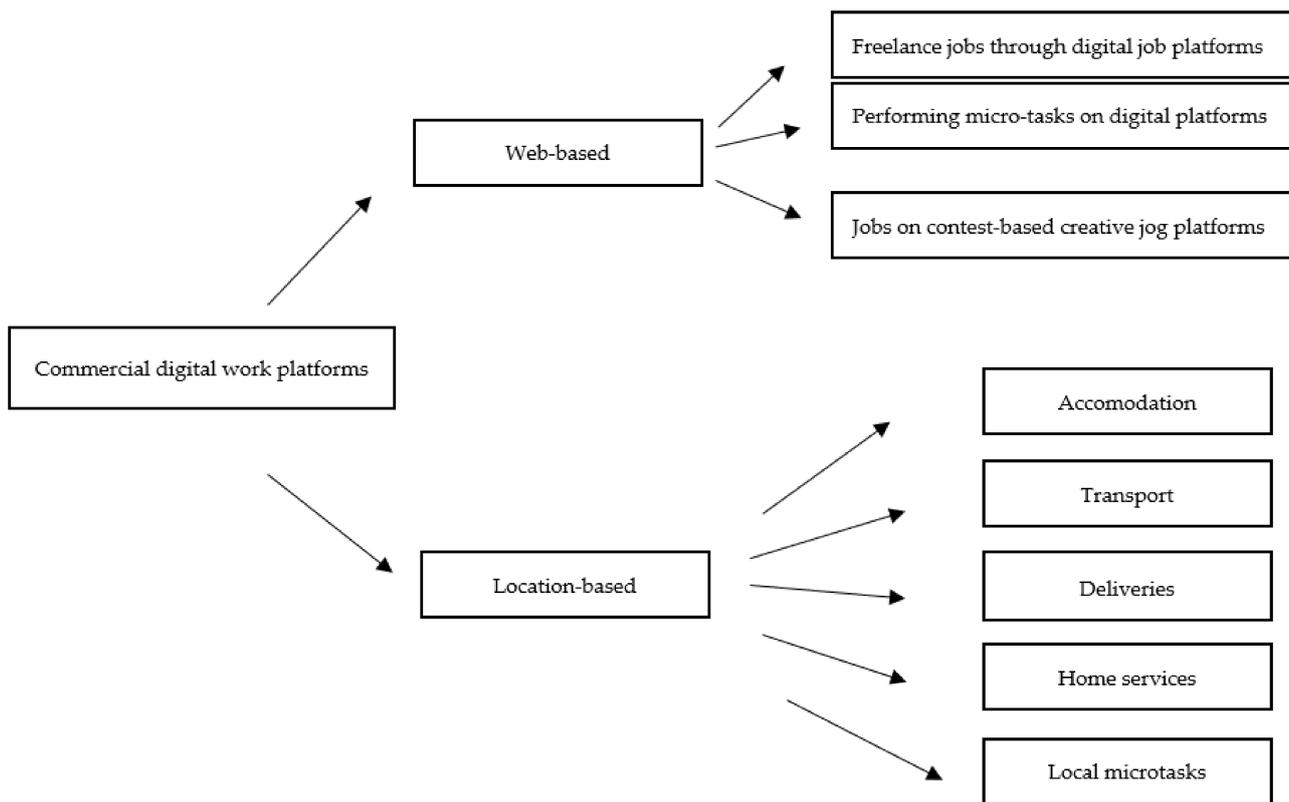


Figure 1. Types of digital labor platforms.

Malo [30] gathers the existence of two large groups such as, on the one hand, crowd working platforms, by which activities that were previously developed by a worker with a contractual relationship are outsourced and, on the other hand, platforms related to on-demand work through applications that, in most of the occasions, is a mere intermediary that marries supply and demand. According to Todolí [54], digital labor platforms can be classified using the degree of globalization of the labor market and control by the digital platform.

Another classification is that made by Cañigüeral [55] using different categorization criteria such as the type of tasks, skill specialization and the level of wage precariousness, fundamentally. In this way, the author considers the existence of digital labor platforms that employ so-called crowdworkers or click-workers, gig workers, workers who resemble traditional blue-collar workers, freelancers and white-collar workers who are involved in projects to be delivered remotely and, finally, specialists. In this sense, the base of the pyramid will contain undifferentiated, precarious tasks. As we move up the pyramid, we move towards the top (specialists) where high income, personal talent and missions are concentrated.

The proliferation of digital labor platforms is proven by the volume of workers employed in the so-called collaborative economy or who perform their tasks through the aforementioned platforms. The COLLEEM survey developed by Pesole [56] determined that in 2017, 9.5% of the adult population in the European Union had provided services via digital platforms, although only 7.5% had been carried out so with some regularity and only 6% can be considered as working in this type of digital infrastructure by dedicating at least 10 hours a week to it or obtaining 25% of their total income through such tasks. A second COLLEEM survey developed by Urzì [57] concluded that there had been an increase in the population that had worked through digital platforms reaching 11%. In the case of Spain, this rose from 12% to 18%, making it the country in the European Union with the highest percentage of the employed population that has provided services through digital platforms.

The impact of the platformization of the economy [2,37] has been directed, in general terms, towards an extreme precariousness of the labor market. Thus, full-time and open-ended jobs have been reduced, the number of employees with temporary, part-time contracts has increased, but also zero-hour contracts considered as those in which “workers are hired by the company without being subject to a specific working time” [2] and self-employment with the so-called false self-employed. Above all, the process of precariousness is also observed in working conditions such as, among others, schedules and conciliation, remuneration, intensification of work or control and management over the performance of the activity.

In relation to working hours, since work on digital platforms is linked to contractual forms such as zero-hour contracts, they are unpredictable because they are subject to demand. Thus, there may be periods of inactivity, linked to lack of demand or other eventualities related to the operation of the application managing the services, which must be assumed and supported by the workers themselves. The risk is not only related to the unpredictability of working time, but also to its lengthening, with long working hours [2] and atypical working hours [57], which entails the risk of self-exploitation of labor.

However, the negative aspects considered in relation to working time flexibility can be seen as positive, if only for those jobs or services performed by higher-skilled workers [51].

In relation to this, there is another risk of low economic retribution. As income is linked to the provision of services or tasks performed rather than to the time dedicated to the performance of the work activity [57], as well as to the low qualification required to carry it out, high economic uncertainty and instability are generated [51]. According to Forde et al. [58], workers on digital platforms obtain lower economic remuneration than those performing the same tasks in the so-called traditional economy.

In relation to the control exercised over the performance of the work activity, it seems that there is a loss of autonomy on the part of the worker, remaining in the hands of the digital platform completely, since it controls the internal market generated by it. In fact, in most digital platforms control is exercised by the algorithm that allows the assignment of tasks to be performed or services to be provided [37,59].

Related to the technological control deployed by algorithms, there is a new form of precariousness of working conditions in digital platforms, such as algorithmic insecurity [2]. In this type of digital infrastructures, the worker has to perform self-marketing tasks [37], as well as strategies that improve his position to be chosen in the future as a task performer or service provider, which are sometimes linked to economic retribution [2]. As a last consequence of this form of precarization of working conditions, emotional oscillation can be considered [37].

The social risks arising from the process of extreme precariousness of working conditions on digital platforms focus on worker representation, as well as future labor and social protections [60]. Since digital platforms have changed the forms of subordination of work, it is expected that many workers may fall outside traditional social protections, so the International Labor Organization is pushing for the creation of minimum labor rights regardless of their status [60]. Similarly, it is being considered “the need to modify the regulation of self-employed workers in order to bring their coverage and contributions into line with those of equivalent salaried workers so as not to harm the sustainability of the system or their own coverage” [60]. In view of this circumstance, specialized insurance has already been created for this type of workers: some for the means of production used by these workers (Zego, Madrid, Spain); others linked to medical problems, unemployment and other contingencies (SomosMuno, Madrid, Spain; StrideHealth, California, United States; Freelancers Union, New York, United States; SafetyWing, San Francisco, United States); and others that are constituted as small-scale mutualization models [55].

As for worker representation, the non-existence of physical work centers also represents a problem for traditional modes of collective representation. In this case, workers of digital labor platforms have promoted the creation of self-organized groups to defend their labor rights [55].

In short, the platformization of the economy and the labor market presents social consequences and challenges that will have to be addressed in the coming decades. Among them, that of extreme precariousness which, in the opinion of authors such as Standing [61], is giving rise to a new social class such as the precariat, whose working and, above all, living conditions are profoundly insecure and deteriorated.

2.3. New Identities in the Collaborative Economy. Life-Modes Theory as a Possibility of Analysis

The concept of identity has been approached from different perspectives, and we can refer mainly to its study from three different theoretical frameworks: ontological, psychosocial and eco-systemic [62]. Without going into the definition of each of these approaches, understanding that it is not appropriate in this paper to dwell on their characteristics, it is necessary to point out the need and the difficulty of synthesizing the individual and social dimensions when approaching the idea of identity in the field of social sciences. In the present case, we are interested in analyzing the idea of identity linked to the context of contemporary labor relations, specifically to the construction of identity that the individuals interviewed describe in relation to the specific activity they perform. For this purpose, we find it convenient to review the possibilities of Life-modes analysis, and thus try to link these precepts with the material of our fieldwork.

Life-modes theory analysis proposes the possibility of analyzing what we call labor cultures [5]. From this theoretical framework, we understand that a given social formation will be constituted by a complex of life-modes, each having its own ideology and system of practices -praxis-. Moreover, this variety of life modes is linked to specific modes of production, so that specific life-mode and its modes of production will be determined, respectively. The perception that an individual has of the characteristics of his activity is therefore linked to a specific praxis that, ultimately, will be explained by the end-means relationship that the individual himself elaborates as a strategy -choice- that shapes his existence in the labor context.

We believe that it is interesting and sufficient, if our interest is to offer an introduction to this theory and its possibilities, to limit ourselves to the life-mode of the self-employed and the wage-earner, since they allow us to observe more clearly their links and differences. In fact, these two figures are the ones that are taken into account when interpreting the regulatory and economic link established between the rider and the platform company.

The ideology -and its practice- of the self-employed understands that there is a link, or rather a continuity, between the concepts of "free time" and "working time"; in contrast with the meaning that for the wage-earner they represent, where "free time" will be the opposite of the idea of "working time". This continuity that we propose for the case of the self-employed is due to the fact that his activity will be an end in itself, and the time spent means the means that allows him to reproduce his self-employed status. From this perspective, the self-employed understands the concept of "freedom" and "flexibility" as an idea linked to his activity, and will organize his working day by making use of this freedom, which does not distinguish between working time and non-working time. Moreover, the self-employed person is not "subjected", either ideologically or normatively, to the directives of a boss; he/she himself/herself designs his/her working day, deciding the time required for each of the tasks that make up the total of his activity. On the other hand, from the point of view of the wage-earner, his/her use of freedom will occur outside the work environment, being in this case obliged to carry out, in due time and form, the activities for which another person guarantees a salary. This being so, and from a perspective of self-perception and comparison, the self-employed will explain the existence of the employee in terms of lack of commitment, dependence and "submission"; he will not understand the decision of those who dispense with the possibility of being their own boss and work for others [5,63].

In relation to the modes of production linked to these life-modes, we may refer to a recurrent debate in the social and economic sciences that refers to the coexistence of two modes of production in contemporary societies: capitalist production and simple

commodity production [64–67]. Simple commodity production has traditionally referred to communities of small farmers and artisans in which they do not exploit the labor of others but are at the same time owners of the means of production and of the producing labor force [63,68–71]. If we consider that self-employed is linked to simple commodity production, we understand that they can expand their working day without increasing expenses; labor is embedded in the family enterprise as life-mode [5,63]. This implies that, together with the idea of “freedom”, of being one’s own boss, another of the defining characteristics of the self-employed would be the idea of “flexibility”. In the use of this freedom, the self-employed will be able to choose how much and how to work and will ultimately be in charge of thinking up strategies that will serve to continue carrying out his activity independently -reproducing his status-.

For its part, the wage-earner will be linked to the capitalist mode of production, where the wage represents the sole reason for which the wage-earner will carry out his activity. The assumptions of this productive mode establish a series of relationships between subjects, around a series of concepts: work, wage, rate and labor market. It is a “game” of negotiations between buyers and sellers, associating a rate to the labor contracted in the labor market. One of the consequences of these links is that the employee will not speak of commitment or freedom in relation to the activity he/she performs, as we have pointed out is the case with the self-employed. In general terms, the tasks of planning, organization and control exercised by the employer, and the subordination of the employee due to the ultimate need to receive a salary, will be the mechanisms that ensure the maintenance of the necessary level of productive activity—in addition to the implementation of the standardization and distribution of tasks, as the structure of a work routine—and the creation of a work routine.

Therefore, it is of interest to transfer these cultural precepts to the case of the analysis of the discourses that we collect for the case of the riders, and thus try to offer a relevant work that, in addition to analyzing their normative and economic conditions, attends to these perceptions in terms of identity and perception.

3. Methodology

This study is based on four propositions that guide the approach to the social construction of the rider’s identity:

- (a) The close relationship between the concepts of work culture and identity;
- (b) The distinction and linkage between individual and collective identities;
- (c) The dynamic aspect of the rider labor market in the platform economy;
- (d) Coexistence of different actors in the social construction of identity.

Under these premises, the general objective of this paper is to make an empirical approach to the socio-labor and economic dynamics that generate the different processes of the social construction of the identity of the digital platform worker in Spain. In order to achieve this objective, the roles, actions and evaluations of the rider will be taken into account, as well as other social agents. Such as companies, public administrations, the media, society as a whole, among others.

Obtaining these assessments has required a mixed methodology, combining different types of sources (primary and secondary) and analysis approaches (qualitative and documentary). With regard to secondary sources, several documents were analyzed, including articles and different research studies, as well as legal texts and statistical sources in Europe and Spain. Finally, with regard to the production of primary data, these came from in-depth semi-structured interviews, gathering the experience of 10 workers linked to one of the most prominent companies in the platform and collaborative economy sector. The criteria for the selection of the interviewees took into account variables that can establish differences in the assessment of the social situation of this group (gender, age, means of transport and vehicle ownership).

Table 1 describes the job profiles of the professionals interviewed. The sample consists of 10 riders or delivery drivers. Of these, 8 are men and 2 are women, aged between 22 and

41 years. These workers use four types of means of transport to carry out their orders (motorcycle 2, scooter 1, bicycle 6 and car 1).

Table 1. List of fieldwork participants.

Profile	Gender	Age	Mean of Transport	Vehicle Ownership Regime
E1	Man	32	Motorcycle (125 cc)	Particular
E2	Man	28	Scooter (49 cc)	Particular
E3	Woman	35	Bicycle	Particular
E4	Man	29	Car	Particular
E5	Man	39	Bicycle	Renting
E6	Woman	22	Bicycle	Renting
E7	Men	31	Bicycle	Particular
E8	Man	41	Motorcycle (125 cc)	Particular
E9	Man	26	Bicycle	Particular
E10	Man	24	Bicycle	Particular

The selection of informants, in its qualitative and quantitative aspects, does not obey sample size criteria that require investigating a percentage sample in relation to the determined study universe. We were interested in developing our ethnographic work by approaching those who were representative. Thus, the number of informants included in this study was limited throughout the research process itself, to the extent that the testimonies obtained were repeating discourses and considerations already collected, which meant that the information was saturated, inferring then that the ethnographic material collected was sufficient to deduce significant and representative conclusions.

The speeches of the workers have allowed us to obtain both objective and subjective assessments of the socio-labor-corporate situation of these delivery drivers, which are incorporated as verbatim quotations among the research results to proceed with their analysis, including the profile of the interviewee (for example: E9, male, 26 years old, private bicycle). The interviews were conducted between January and June 2020, through face-to-face interviews.

Table 2 shows that we established 2 main dimensions to structure the content of the interviews conducted, material and ideological. Each of these dimensions contains some common elements, which we found in most of the interviews conducted. In order to establish categories and analyze the different dimensions to organize the structure of the interviews, we used MaxQda program. The use of this software for processing and analyzing ethnographic material led us to design the following structural relationship of the interviews.

Table 2. Dimensions for the analysis of fieldwork material.

Material Dimension	Ideological Dimension
Labor precariousness	Identity and corporate acculturation Subjective and self-perceived meaning of the rider as a worker
Working conditions Work-life balance Incentives and penalties SAadaptive strategies	Labour biography Comparison to previous labour experiences Success stories/frustration stories
	Ideology/Values
Access to employment as: (1) self-employed, (2) wage-earner	Motivations/advantages Insecurities/disadvantages Life changes Work time/free time

4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the analysis of the ethnographic material collected in our fieldwork is carried out. The testimonies of the different informants will be interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework proposed, that is, linked to the context of labor precariousness and identity, and within the framework of life-modes analysis. The most relevant testimonies are presented, offered by different key informants who work or worked for some of the main home delivery platforms. The aim is not to offer a vertical and top-down analysis where the empirical material would depend on our conceptual framework. On the contrary, and understanding that an inductive methodology must operate in these terms, it will be from the ethnographic material obtained, that is, from the different narratives collected, when we intend to interpret their possibilities in relation to the theoretical assumptions presented. Therefore, we are interested in analyzing the most relevant fragments, so that from them we can extrapolate the relationship they establish with their activity within the framework of what we understand as “labor cultures”, in the context of the collaborative and platform economy.

We propose different categories that make up the totality of the phenomenon we analyze, so the results and their discussion are presented structured in relation to each of these dimensions. For the analysis and discussion of each of these proposed categories, we establish two broad dimensions: material dimension and ideological dimension.

4.1. Material Dimension

4.1.1. Labor Precariousness

The dimension of labor precariousness should be analyzed in relation to different factors or characteristics in which we understand this value to be articulated. In this sense, we approach the interpretation of this factor in relation to the concepts of working conditions, working hours, income, family and personal reconciliation, incentives and punishments.

Working Conditions

This first section allows us to situate the figure of what we agree to call *homo rider* from a broad perspective, i.e., in the context of the debate on whether he/she is wage-earner or, on the contrary, a self-employed. This is an interesting discussion, and one that has generated controversy since the introduction of this category in the Spanish labor scene.

If we consult the websites of two of these service management companies, in the section on how to apply for a job in the company, we find both discourses of linkage with the company -which seems to question the subject as an employee- and a proposal of autonomy and self-management more typical of a profile of activity as a self-employed. We found slogans such as “this project is also yours”, “together we win”, which would imply this idea of integrating the rider in the business project, which could be interpreted beyond the figure of collaborator, which is usually the treatment given to the rider. However, we have also found that one of these companies refers to the rider in the following terms: “Work whenever you want. Work as a freelancer with total freedom. Choose where you connect and what orders you accept”.

Beyond analyzing the implications derived from the type of legal consideration that this figure obtains, we are interested in the narratives that the different informants elaborate in relation to their personal experience, and thus infer, from their experiences, the labor condition of the *homo rider*. In this sense, we come across a first testimony that meticulously breaks down the costs derived from what he considers his self-employed status:

“Working 9 h every day, maybe you rest one day, you can get an average of 50 euros a day. Maybe 1500–1400 [euros] a month, depending on the month. Take away the self-employed [monthly quota], the gasoline, the consultant’s expenses, the VAT, which is paid separately. When you receive the invoice from Glovo, the VAT is paid separately. In the end, you get about 1000 euros a month”. (E1)

This description is identified with the discourse that we interpret as typical of a self-employed worker who knows and details how the expenses derived from this activity are organized. In contrast to the wage-earner who, in general terms, we understand to be incorporated into a complex productive process that is alienating and tedious—due to this very alienation and disengagement in relation to the extent of the process—the self-employed does participate in the direct management of his activity. The informant explains his “strategy” by taking advantage of a rebate on Social Security expenses to encourage self-employment in Spain. This is the so-called “flat rate” that involves the payment of a reduced monthly fee for new self-employer:

“Since there is a flat rate, I pay 67 euros a month. After that, I don’t know how many months, I think I will have to pay twice as much, and that way I can stay two years. For the time being, it works out well for me. It suits me”. (E1)

Both in the previous fragment and in this last one, it is interesting to note that this individual does not dedicate himself exclusively to home delivery, but combines this activity with a work contract at a regional television station. In his own words, the time he invests in G. is “a bonus to pay for whims”, and we can interpret it as a strategy that makes use of two factors: the flexibility that home delivery work allows and the possibility of benefiting from the flat rate for self-employment offered by the Administration. This interviewee sees the existence of this platform work as an opportunity “if you’re smart”. This interviewee sees the existence of this platform work as an opportunity “if you’re smart”. A liberal interpretation that coincides with the discourse of another interviewee, who sees opportunities, without necessarily wondering about contradictory aspects in the nature of this employment relationship:

“This [platform work] is the future. Well, it’s the present. And you have to be quick and seize this opportunity. If you have a bike and you’re fast, then you’re going to make money”. (E9)

Along the same lines of self-employment, we find the discourse of another informant, a 22-year-old student who interprets this activity as something temporary, so that she can pay for her studies and the rent for a room. In contrast with the previous informant, who does not perceive this work as a precarious activity, this individual does speak of what she understands as an employment relationship in which she “loses out”:

“This is not for life. It’s clear to me. Here you can only lose: they pay little and even if it seems easy to earn it, you have to pedal a lot. Besides, you have to “fight” for orders, especially on weekends. As soon as I finish my studies, I’ll quit”. (E6)

These testimonies contrast with other informants who place the work of home delivery as a unique activity, far from the idea of complementary work presented by the previous informant. The following informant, a 39-year-old man, describes his work relationship in these terms:

“I don’t have anything else right now [no job]. I have a son. I’m separated and there’s no work for me [he previously worked as a salesperson]. And this job depends on the hours you want to put in. I work 8 or 10 h a day and I have a salary as if I were a waiter or almost as if I were at the construction site”. (E5)

Although it will be discussed in more detail later in the section on adaptive strategies, it is important to note that this rider uses a rental bicycle for work. This is a rental offered by the city council of this city and allows him “not to spend on material, only on what I spend on my cell phone per month”.

Along the same line of understanding this activity as precarious and temporary, we find the testimony of another informant:

“It’s a pittance but I can’t do anything else. It’s the only thing I can do at the moment. At least I know that every day I have some work”.

Most of the testimonies interpret it in these terms, and do not understand the work linked to delivery platforms in the terms of flexibility and intermittent collaboration that could be perceived from the discourse that transcends from the companies themselves.

Workday and Work-Life Balance

The platforms that serve as intermediaries between the rider and the end client establish working time slots available. In the following excerpt, we note that our informant uses the term “catch hours”, an approach that seems to indicate the existence of a working hours management system, so that these platforms can allocate hours according to certain criteria.

“Here in Murcia there are 11 h maximum that you can take [daily]. If you take all the hours you earn about 50 euros a day. From 10 o’clock until 12 o’clock at night. Then you organize yourself. If you start at 10, you rest a couple of hours in the afternoon and then again”. (E2)

This characteristic of flexibility is important in the analysis of the relationship between riders and their work platform. In fact, most of the platforms consulted put forward a vision in which the rider is presented as a collaborator, emphasizing the self-employed character, this *homo rider* that we are trying to define would be a 4.0 worker who carries out his activity by taking advantage of the virtues of flexible work. In this sense, the companies refer to the terms “freedom”, “flexibility”, an “easy way to earn money” that you can also “combine with other activities”. This idea of flexibility would be related to the concept of family/personal reconciliation. In a context of labor relations where conciliation is presented as a social contingency that offers almost always unsatisfactory and incomplete answers, this sharing activity is presented as an agile possibility. We are therefore interested in investigating the foundations of this relationship that makes work-life balance possible, and so we asked various informants about this issue.

“Reconciliation? Well, if you have no children, no studies, no other things to do, OK, it could be [...] This is designed for young people who need money and work for a while. Also for people like me, with no other possibilities, who take a moto or pedal all the time”. (E8)

This is the testimony of an immigrant worker who explains his difficulty in accessing other employment opportunities. In this sense, he understands that it is indeed a job opportunity to obtain some income, but very far from the attractive proposal aimed at other profiles. On this matter another informant expands information, explaining that there are certain hours and days a week in which one is “obliged” to work:

“At the beginning you don’t get rid of working on days of high demand and at some fixed hours. Saturday nights you have to work. Then there is the penalty if you don’t respond to some orders. They block you and you have to wait”. (E1)

This comment leads us to wonder about the system of incentives and punishments used by these platforms, so that we can better understand the relationship established in these terms. In addition, investigating how this control system works will lead us to further question the strategies that riders will carry out in order to be more efficient in their working relationship, taking into consideration these limits.

Incentives and Penalties

These home delivery management platforms use a system of incentives and, if we want to put it this way, also of penalties or sanctions. The following informant describes as “parameters of excellence” the method that this particular platform activates for what we can call “managing its human resources”, so that availability in certain time slots is rewarded:

“We have parameters of excellence. The platform scores you. It depends on the orders you place. For 28 days, you have to be available on high-demand days, which are Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, for three hours each of those days. Maybe you have to make, in

Murcia there are 60 orders in those days of high demand in the whole month. They can be done. But of course, now there are so many glovers that it's more difficult to do it". (E1)

Exclusivity is "suggested" at certain times of the week, during peak demand times. An idea that another informant already pointed out. On the one hand, a practice that contradicts the legal nature of the figure of the self-employed, and leads us rather to think of the notes of "supervision" and "dependence" referred to in the Spanish Workers' Statute to describe the scope of application of wage-earners. On the other hand, it would be a system that discriminates against access to work in the case of compliance or not with this "discipline", an aspect that, as said before, contradicts the request for exclusivity that is distracted in the alleged figure of self-employment. It thus sustains a situation of precariousness in a necessary demonstration of availability and total efficiency. A system of "ranking and scoring" as another informant explains:

"Then you have a score, up to 100, and if you don't get to those orders, it drops your score. Then you can take less high-demand hours [the slot where you get paid more per hour], the hours you take later. Because at 4 p.m. the high-demand order opens on those days, so if you have a low score you can't access the platform until 7 p.m. You don't have access to the platform until 7 p.m. It's one against the other to be able to place more orders in those hours".

Apparently, there is no obligation to connect at certain hours per week, and it would be allowed to refuse certain services, but algorithms are used to manage the performance of workers on the platform. In this way, a system is implemented in such a way that people who have worked more hours or who have provided more services are rewarded more. Moreover, the algorithms take into account the past activity history of the riders in order to determine their future activity and plan their future disposition in relation to this accumulated data. So those with more connection or more availability during high-demand hours, less rejected services, will have preference when receiving new assignments or choosing shifts. This determines the performance of the riders in relation to the platform metrics.

In addition, we must take into account that the riders acquire a rating given by the customers. Once the order has been delivered, customers have the possibility to rate the service, which, in a concrete way, refers to the rider's performance:

"And then there's the customer's score that also affects you. If the client rates you poorly, it lowers your score. By lowering your score, you take fewer hours and lose money". (E10)

This is another form of supervision and dependence on the platform, beyond the discourse of collaboration and distancing that can be interpreted by the company itself.

Adaptive Strategies

This "new" collaborative economy would be linked to the "postmodern" concepts of the liquid modernity [72,73], which leads us to an idea of urgency and speed in the context of labor relations. The use of new technologies (smart phone) to cover needs that arise as spontaneous demands (customer orders with a delivery time) in a labor context with increasing competition due to the increase of riders offering their services.

"When we were 50 glovers it was easier. If you were close to an order, the order was for you. Right now there are about 115 glovers [in a year]. Demand hasn't gone up that much but they've gone up a lot of glovers so we're always close [to the order]. That makes you get paid less and more profit for the company". (E7)

In this particular situation, with a significant increase of riders, this informant tells us about the strategy of some colleagues that has resulted in finding a waiting area for orders where the signal, apparently, arrives earlier.

"Put yourself close to where the messages arrive first. At Carrefour, around that area he noticed that he got there sooner". (E7)

It would seem that another alternative would be to choose between one platform or another, since small details between them seem to make it easier to work with one or the other:

“The internal theme is different. D is more comfortable to work with. Although the client sees it the same, although the work looks the same, but it gives more facilities. It’s not that it pays better, because at the end of the day the benefit is the same”. (E4)

In any case, the discourse seems to be on the means of transport to be used to be more efficient. They seem to agree that the motorcycle is the most agile way to be able to attend to orders, although we find that next to this choice it is the bicycle that is mostly used. This has to do with the urban design of this city, which allows bicycle trips to be made with some ease.

“In any case, I tell you that the best thing to do is to go by bike. You will have seen it, almost everybody rides a bike [...] I calculate more or less: if I earn 1000 euros a month, you have to take out the self-employed quote, the VAT that you pay every month for the quarter, the withholdings that they make you also pay, and what you pay for Internet”. (E7)

4.2. Ideological Dimension

The ideology of the *homo rider* or even we may refer to the social construction of its reality [74] is based on its activity. This material aspect and the social relations surrounding this activity determine its consciousness as a rider. It is the conjunction of a series of elements that would act as a constellation around the *homo rider*’s identity. In the first place, the appreciation and assimilation of a material and aesthetic discourse emanating from the company itself, mainly in relation to the ideas of flexibility, freedom and unbound availability. This discourse offers a self-perception that differentiates it from “other jobs” in use, far from the more canonical figure of the salaried employee subordinated to the control and supervision of a superior. Secondly, we should point out the importance of the use of a new language that reinforces this configuration of a “new labor culture”.

4.2.1. Identity and Corporate Acculturation

The acculturation process begins with the adhesion to the platform as a rider and would point towards the configuration of a rider’s imaginary:

“It’s true that it’s been a few years and it’s not so new. But being part of this company is something that many wanted to do. It was already being talked about in other countries, and I was looking forward to being able to do it here [. . .] It is fun to be a rider”. (E5)

This testimony points out how this is a global phenomenon that homogenizes a way of carrying out this activity through the configuration of the rider as a paradigmatic figure. In this sense, we may refer to the difference between company culture, defined as a type of culture existing in informal terms, and organizational culture that would be characterized by its “deliberate design by the top management so that its members and workers are united through a series of artifacts, values and basic assumptions” [75]. Of course, if we refer to the existence of artifacts to identify and define a certain organizational culture of these individuals, we find a variety of discourses that illustrate this:

“[...] Yes, the yellow backpack. And others, D.’s, wear that blue one. Which I, by the way, don’t like. I find it too bulky. This one is more comfortable”. (E7)

We note in this case a description of the device (backpack) owned by the company in which he provides his service as “better” in comparative terms with the other device (backpack) they carry in another delivery company. It would be a whole display of complements that indicate a way of working as a rider. Something different, we insist, to the conventional forms of home delivery of goods and services.

“And this is the credit card we have. With this we pay when we go to pick up an order, and then it gets charged to the customer’s account. But this is my card, what I carry and I am responsible for”. (E1)

When asked about the evolution of this phenomenon in quantitative terms, that is, if there has been a significant change in the profession, we obtain answers that seem to indicate that as there are more riders, this figure is identified differently in the group itself and from the outside. In this line we find two testimonies that point to a change, in spite of being a relatively recent phenomenon. It seems that they offer us reflections with a certain perspective or, at least, that they elaborate from the perception of a significant change.

“At the beginning, when we were less glovers, I liked it more. It seemed like something special, different [...] There are more and more of us, and already it even seems that people are bothered to see us with bikes on the streets”. (E6)

“This has changed. Well, it’s changing. Don’t you see? There are a lot of people now. What used to be something different, something new, is now just another thing [...] Now everything is full of Amazon vans, of us at Glovo. It doesn’t seem to last long to be in something new. We are already delivery people”. (E7)

A statement that seems to claim the persistence of a shared identity, distinct and, in some ways, as it is argued, better than other ways of working in the context of home delivery. It is perceived to be part of a work sequence that we could define as specialized, focused on the single task of delivery as a purpose and therefore linked to this company as its own activity.

4.2.2. Subjective and Self-Perceived Meaning of the Rider as a Worker

It is interesting to note a change of register or a split in some cases. In one of the interviews, we found a discourse that refers to the precarious situation (due to schedules, the need to meet specific requests, among other issues). However, when asked about the image of the company, about her feeling of being part of an “identity” as a rider, she seems to leave aside those material considerations and describes her perception as a rider

“Working at G is cool. I like wearing the backpack, I like the color of it. You go with the bike, you do the shopping you are asked to do, you pay with your credit card.. Besides, you are part of this group, of this community [...] Sometimes I feel like someone important, giving a service like in an American movie”. (E1)

In this sense, we refer to the existence of a labor culture of the rider as an expression of the implicit and explicit individual and social project. An identity that signifies a way of being, thinking and acting and that, as we see in this testimony, seems to attend to aesthetic aspects and belonging to an ideal (idealized) image. This informant is able to answer our question by distinguishing between the material characteristics of his job (which he considers precarious working conditions) and the meaning he attributes to an aesthetic sphere and belonging.

This labor culture of the rider would be based on ideological elements that seem to have a relevant value for users, and which refer to issues of social recognition, prestige, pride, sense of belonging, desire for self-improvement and, in short, the continuity of a project. We can see this reaffirmation in the comparison established by this informant, who understands that the type of delivery work on these platforms is “different” from other delivery work.

“In G. it is different. I’ve been a delivery driver in other places, smaller companies, even as a freelancer with my van, but it’s not the same. Here everything is more organized. With your cell phone you can see everything: when you work, what you have done. Everything”. (E8)

5. Conclusions

From our fieldwork, it is of interest to look at the narratives offered from two spheres: from the company itself and the testimonies of the riders themselves. In the first place, the platform is a business model that, upon settling in a certain territory, offers a discourse that presents itself as a non-business, but rather as a technological intermediary that recruits available personnel based on a crowdsourcing strategy. In this sense, they are proposed as entities radically different from small and medium-sized companies, linked to the context of Industry 4.0, which propose a new labor culture that confronts the Spanish labor regulatory assumptions.

For their part, the individuals interviewed offer discourses that, in some cases and beyond the material analysis, point to the configuration of a rider identity that indicates the emergence and consolidation of a new profile in the field of home delivery work. Neither self-employed nor salaried. A figure that would be between these two spheres, from the interpretation of Life-modes theory analysis. However, these are not ideal types, that is, we find nuances in the discourses of the riders that, precisely, denote that this is a relatively recent social phenomenon, and that the dimensions of self-perception and definition of their condition are in process. In fact, there is even an argumentative confrontation between those who understand their configuration as employees and those who perceive themselves as self-employed. Those who perceive themselves as self-employed position themselves in favor of the companies, understanding that the regulation of their status as employees would hinder their continuity in the company. This material condition determines their awareness of their relationship with the company, and they are more inclined to accept the narratives that refer to the idea of collaboration as a “soft” labor relationship.

From the material perspective, this is a new model that breaks the logic of labor regulations and that, in the case of Spain and Europe, a legal debate is taking place that asks what type of employment is being generated through these platforms. In this sense, in the European countries where this phenomenon has occurred with more intensity, we find two phases: (1) disparate criteria in the Jurisprudence, so that the individuals linked to these platforms could be self-employed or wage-earners, indistinctly; (2) a process in which consensus begins to exist, and it is agreed to place riders as wage-earners. In this aspect, in Spain, the labor inspectorate first contemplated this phenomenon, anticipating a task that was later carried out by the Jurisprudence and that situates these workers as dependent, that is to say, wage-earner.

Parallel to this material interpretation that deals with characterizing the material and economic aspects of this phenomenon, we must attend to the ideological dimension and, specifically, to the configuration of the identity of this figure of the *homo rider*. In this aspect, we find that this phenomenon, in the mental sphere of riders the narrative of the platform has permeated in such a way that their legal status is not questioned. The discourse that identifies riders as partners and not as dependent workers of these platforms has managed to configure the *homo rider* identity. It is an identity built on the use of a neolanguage that precisely facilitates the *homo rider* to distance itself from the jargon of normalized labor relations, entering into this new labor culture. Thus, we do not speak of work but of gigs, we do not refer to workers but to collaborators, we do not speak of salary in a strict way.

In relation to the perspective of the company and the regulatory bodies, it seems to us that the ideological aspect should be taken into account, also considering the precepts of Life-modes theory, in order to contribute to a broader perception of this phenomenon. In other words, they cannot limit themselves to perceiving the material aspect in order to discuss whether they are considered self-employed or salaried. It is a “new” figure that is a product of the current moment linked to ICT, and which implies an assimilation and a process of self-perception in the context of labor relations. An approach that would also lead us to studies from a psychological perspective that would reconsider the concept of burn out, for example.

We should point out the assumptions and possibilities of Life-modes theory in order to analyze the labor culture of the rider from this perspective. In this sense, the

homo rider would be a hybrid somewhere between a wage-earner and the self-employed. The precepts of freedom and flexibility perceived and promoted by the platform companies would transcend in generating a self-employed-collaborator mentality, not especially linked to the project, being then a means to achieve a salary adapted to their possibilities of availability. However, the mechanisms to generate incentives and penalties according to the performance and availability of the rider create the notes of a wage-earner. In this sense, the testimonies obtained have differentiated this double dimension, depending on the identity they developed, “feeling” wage-earner or understanding their labor ration as self-employed.

Finally, we understand that this proposal is a preliminary and limited approach to a complex and global phenomenon. It would be relevant to advance in this line of research by (1) increasing the sample size; (2) making a comparison among different territories, and thus investigate similarities and differences in relation to other variables; (3) incorporating the question of gender; (4) paying attention to the evolution of this figure derived from the regulatory progress that finally interprets the rider as a wage-earner.

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