

Editors' Note: Introduction to the Thematic Issue on Power and Control in Platform Monopoly Capitalism

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In 2001, Paul DiMaggio edited a book entitled *The Twenty-First-Century Firm: Changing Economic Organization in International Perspective*. In the opening sentence of his lead essay,¹ DiMaggio observed that “many people believe the corporation is changing so dramatically that we need a new lexicon to describe it.” After pointing to a plethora of disparate attempts by other authors who sought “the right word to characterize the company of the future in a time of dizzying change,” DiMaggio presented a masterful summary of challenges to the twentieth-century model and pointed to key elements of emergent alternative models. In that introductory essay and in the theoretically and empirically rich chapters that followed, the book provided a clear picture of the main directions of organizational change. Among these, it anticipated how

changes in information technology expand the capacity of firms not only to monitor their workers and production processes but also to engage more employees in processes of product design and organizational change, to bring more information into the company, and to get products out to consumers in ways that dramatically alter cost structures and organizational designs (DiMaggio, 2001, p. 4).

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1. Paul DiMaggio, “Introduction: Making Sense of the Contemporary Firm and Prefiguring Its Future,” pp. 3–30 in Paul DiMaggio (Ed.), *The Twenty-First-Century Firm: Changing Economic Organization in International Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

By calling attention to these processes, DiMaggio and his colleagues were pointing to issues that go to the very heart of the current debate about platforms. The term “platform,” however, never appears in the book. But its absence can hardly be faulted since this new organizational form was only embryonic at the time.

Twenty years later, we devote this Thematic Issue of *Sociologica* to the platform model which, after an extraordinarily rapid development, is arguably the distinguishing organizational form of the first part of the Twenty-First century.

Our Thematic Issue follows on a debate about platforms launched in the journal with the article by Elisabeth Anne Watkins and David Stark “The Möbius Organizational Form: Make, Buy, Cooperate, or Co-opt?” (*Sociologica*, 12(1), 2018), and then by Gernot Grabher and Jonas König in their article “Disruption, Embedded. A Polanyian Framing of the Platform Economy” (*Sociologica*, 14(1), 2020). This Thematic Issue takes up the questions posed by these articles, enriches them with new perspectives, and focuses especially on issues of power and control.

The Thematic Issue is organized in three sections.

The lead essay by **David Stark and Ivana Pais** on “Algorithmic Management in the Platform Economy” analyses the platform as a new organizational form distinct from markets, hierarchies and networks. The paper explores how platforms co-opt the behavior of providers and users through non-bureaucratic rules, ratings translated into rankings, and twisted feedback loops that deflect accountability. It relates power asymmetries at the organizational level to coalitions at the regulatory level.

Jamie Peck and Rachel Phillips’ article “The Platform Conjuncture” presents a reading of platform capitalism in dialogue with the work of Fernand Braudel, focusing in particular on the idea of platforms as “anti-markets” and looking at their “zone d’opacité.” Situating the platform economy geographically as well as historically, the paper introduces a typology of the regulatory and corporate geographies of platform capitalism.

In “The Rise of Online Platforms and the Triumph of the Corporation,” **Koen Frenken and Lea Fuenfschilling** challenge the dominant understanding of online platforms as digital marketplaces and develop a mirror-image conceptualization of online platforms as corporations. Analyzing platforms as a historical continuation of the corporation as a basic institution in society, they argue that it is a new corporate form, emphasizing its re-coding capacity as a basis for its transformative power.

Drawing on rich empirical analysis, **Koray Caliskan’s** article, “Platform Works as Stack Economization: Cryptocurrency Markets and Exchanges in Perspective,” argues that cryptocurrency exchange platforms go beyond marketization processes by providing a variety of functions that are not typically of the market but are nevertheless core to the operations of these platforms. He proposes the concept of “stack” to describe the process of socio-digital economization that takes place in these data money exchanges.

The paper by **Mehmet Cansoy, Samantha Eddy, Isak Ladegaard and Juliet B. Schor**, “*Homines Diversi*: Heterogeneous Earner Behaviors in the Platform Economy,” analyzes the heterogeneity of workers as a consequence of the “retreat from control.” Interviewing earners from Airbnb, TaskRabbit, and StocksyUnited, they identify three different behavioral models — *homo economicus*, *homo socialis* and *homo instrumentalis* — and discuss the related platform policies.

Janet Vertesi, Adam Goldstein, Diana Enriquez, Larry Liu and Katherine T. Miller, in “Pre-Automation: Insourcing and Automating the Gig Economy,” examine a strategic configuration in the technology, logistics, and robotics industries that they call “pre-automation.” They argue that some monopoly forms of platform labor may be viewed as an intermediate

arrangement. They discuss Uber, Amazon Flex, and Amazon Delivery Services Partnership Program drivers as paradigmatic cases.

The second section is a *Symposium* on Grabher and König's "Disruption Embedded: A Polanyian Framing of the Platform Economy," with four commentaries.

Koray Caliskan in "Polanyi, Callon, and Amazon: Institutionalism, ANT, and DRAN Approaches to Platform Economies" focuses on Grabher and König's (re-)interpretation of the Polanyian approach through the lens of *marketization* and discusses how the DRAN approach (Devices, Representations, Actors, and Networks) can contribute to an analysis of platforms.

The second commentary, authored by **Kevin Woojin Lee and Elizabeth Anne Watkins**, "From Performativity to Performances: Reconsidering Platforms' Production of the Future of Work, Organizing, and Society" builds on Grabher and König's essay by focusing on how digital platforms are realized on the ground and offers a taxonomy of three ways that people intervene in how platforms produce the future (innovation, articulation, and opposition).

Ivana Pais and Giancarlo Provasi, in "Share vs Platform Economy," analyse the change of register detected by Grabher and König from "sharing euphoria" to "platforms disillusion" and suggest new ways of approaching this dispute, discussing the difference between the Polanyian *double movement* after the crisis of 1929 and the absence of it after the subprime crisis of 2008.

Martin Kenney, John Zysman and Dafna Bearson's commentary, "Transformation or Structural Change? What Polanyi Can Teach Us about the Platform Economy," focuses on the platform as both a symbol and an organizing mechanism. They see socio-technical innovation as the critical fulcrum for the changing dynamics of capitalist accumulation, related to Polanyi's insight that the reach of the market is based upon increased commodification.

Responding to these comments, **Gernot Grabher**, in "Enclosure 4.0: Seizing Data, Selling Predictions, Scaling Platforms," further elaborates the Polanyian interpretative framework. In this essay, Grabher goes beyond the initial contribution by undertaking an entirely original analysis of how the platform model is being extended from services and retail into the business-to-business realm as *industrial platforms* in the automotive and agricultural sectors.

In the third and final *Focus* section **Paolo Magaudda and Marco Solaroli** offer a review essay, "Platform Studies and Digital Cultural Industries." This paper reviews scholarly research on the platformization of cultural industries, addresses three distinctive domains of cultural production and consumption — music, journalism, and photography — and suggests emerging paths for future research.

As readers of *Sociologica* know, publishing special issues is an important feature of our journal. In vol. 14, no. 2 (2020) we published the special issue *From Value to Values, from Field to Discipline: Understanding Journalistic Culture in the 21st Century* edited by Chris Anderson. That followed *The Contamination of Practices: How Practice Theories Matter in Multiple Domains*, edited by Paolo Magaudda and Emanuela Mora, in vol. 13, no. 3 (2019).

In addition to these special symposia, *Sociologica* is also running a special feature, *Society after COVID-19*, publishing essays and empirical studies in vol. 14, numbers 1, 2, and 3 (2020). This topic will be further addressed in vol. 15, no. 1 (2021), in the symposium "Against 'Disaster': Critical Reflections on the Concept" in the COVID-19 context, edited by Rebecca Elliott and Ryan Hagen. This issue will also contain a symposium "Doing Social Sciences Via Comics and Graphic Novels," edited by Eduardo Barberis and Barbara Gruening, followed by a symposium on "Wealthy People between Economy and Society: Structure, Reproduction, Legitimation," edited by Joselle Dagnes & Luca Storti in vol. 15, no. 2 (2021).

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