The opportunities and challenges to work in the 21st century

Last Modified on 09/30/2017 10:13 am EDT

Darren Sharp is the director of Social Surplus , a strategy consultancy that works with governments and communities to activate the sharing economy in cities. He is the Australian editor of Shareable, Melbourne coordinator of the Shareable's city network and is undertaking doctoral research on urban experiments for sustainability transitions. We interviewed him to hear his concerns and perspective on worker protection and empowerment from an urban perspective.



What are important worker protection concerns emerging with the rise of the sharing economy?

While millions of people working in the gig economy as freelancers, drivers and task runners enjoy great flexibility they also have to contend with little to no worker protections. Gig workers in general are not classified as employees which means they have to maintain their own equipment, pay for their own insurance and retirement, and take on an unequal burden of risk with no safety net. There are growing calls for legislation to compel platform owners to contribute towards a 'portable benefits fund ' which would follow freelancers and gig workers from job to job and provide a degree of protection that employees take for granted like sick leave and holiday pay. Data has also become a key asset class of the 21st century and building block for the sharing economy. Data ownership tied to citizen rights and city sovereignty is becoming a priority area to ensure democratic governance of public infrastructure and strengthen the urban commons . This is especially important with the advent of the Internet of Things (IoT) as platforms begin to function more like utilities that provide essential services in transportation, housing and energy.

> *"Workers don't have any control over the algorithms which determine what jobs they get, and platform owners are not responsible for the welfare of*

> *the people creating value in these two-sided marketplaces."*

How are cities currently addressing these concerns?

New York City's Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative



WCBDI is a way to reduce poverty and income inequality through support of worker-owned cooperatives. Municipal investment through WCBDI across 10 partner organizations provides support for existing worker cooperatives, has kick-started the creation of new worker cooperatives, and assisted small businesses convert to worker-owned models.

Seoul's Sharing City program



The program supports the creation of high-value jobs in the local sharing economy that leverage the city's advanced ICT infrastructure and open access to a range of shared assets for residents, businesses and tourists. Seoul supports sharing enterprises through subsidies from taxes paid by citizens and reviews corporate and not-for-profit entities that provide sharing services. It designates them as sharing enterprises/organizations if they commit to solving urban problems through sharing via the economy, welfare, culture, environment and transportation sectors.

Procomuns



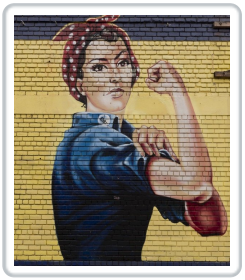
Procomuns has developed and proposed over 120 related policy recommendations which have been embraced by Barcelona's city council, including specific measures related to work. The goal of these policy recommendations is to promote fair, respectful and nonexploitative working conditions through the elimination of labor exploitation, sexual harassment, and gender gaps.

DECODE

DECODE is a €5m EU-funded project to develop open data commons pilots in Barcelona and Amsterdam using blockchain technologies to give people ownership of their data and use IoT devices to share assets for mutual benefit without the need for intermediary platforms.

How can the sharing economy empower workers and increase prosperity?

The sharing economy can be harnessed to allocate value on a more equitable basis. Trebor Scholz, from the New School, developed the term 'platform co-operative ' to describe a new category of enterprises that are concerned with protecting the financial interests of people who create value in the sharing economy through collective ownership and democratic governance. Scholz has developed 10 principles for platform cooperativism: 1) Collective ownership; 2) Decent pay and income security; 3) Transparency and data portability; 4) Appreciation and acknowledgement; 5) Co-determined work; 6) A protective legal framework; 7) Portable workers protection and benefits; 8) Protection against arbitrary behavior; 9) Rejection of excessive workplace surveillance; and 10) The right to log off. The emerging platform cooperatives sector is giving gig workers the ability to become part-owners of the platforms they rely on for their livelihoods. Read here how New York City empowers its workers.



Can you give some examples?

Examples of successful platform co-ops include Modo , a Vancouver, Canada-based carsharing cooperative, Stocksy United , an artist-owned cooperative that sells stock-photography online, and Green Taxi Cooperative in Denver, Colorado that distributes profits back to its 800 driver-member-owners. Platform co-operatives address concerns for social equity and worker's rights through new digital platforms that promote solidarity and create a fairer future of work.

> *"Cities can leverage the sharing economy to increase prosperity and address inequality by enacting stronger worker protections, building support for portable benefits, data sovereignty, and the development of platform co-operatives."* - **Darren Sharp**