

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# David against Goliath: from riders' protest to platform cooperativism

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## Abstract

Faced with platforms such as Uber, riders are resisting individually and organising actions such as Riders X Derechos in Spain. Some of these 'new proletarians' have even organised themselves into cooperatives. To the global utopia of investor-owned platforms, platform cooperativism opposes the utopia of delivery without exploitation or carbon emissions through local cooperatives owned by riders. Based on the case study of the Mensakas cooperative in Barcelona, this ethnography analyses the link between riders' protests and cooperative platforms. It questions the concrete effects of 'counter-platform politics' and the relationship between politics and labour. It also examines the strategies of intercooperation in the 'cyclelogistical' sector to understand the institutional, social, and political conditions that foster the 're-embeddedness' of the bike delivery market.

**Keywords:** counter-platform; platform cooperativism; sociology of social movements; sociology of work; Uberisation

**JEL Codes:** A12; J540; Z00

## Introduction

Between 2010 and 2020, the number of digital labour platforms has increased fivefold (International Labour Organization (ILO) 2021), mainly in Europe and North America. This phenomenon, also called 'amazonification' 'gigification', or 'uberisation', affects a wide range of sectors, including taxi drivers, online micro-tasks, and home delivery. Although platform capitalism (Srnicsek 2017) accounts for a small proportion of jobs at a worldwide scale<sup>1</sup> (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2019), its activity is steadily expanding. According to the previsions of the European Council,<sup>2</sup> in 2023 more than 28 million people will be working on digital platforms, increasing to 43 million in 2025. In the bike delivery sector, the number of couriers has exploded with the proliferation of place-based platforms (unlike web-online-based platforms that rely on crowd-working), especially meals-on-wheels platforms. In this context, 'uberisation' rests upon outsourcing almost all the workforce through on-demand work and 'lean' platforms (Srnicsek 2017) that have no asset except their software. Platforms are not just simply intermediaries connecting workers and customers: the exploitation of riders goes with the extraction of customers' data. This 'data-driven business' model provides a better understanding of the logic behind investor-owned platforms and the gigantic fundraising campaigns that keep an unprofitable model afloat. They can be understood broadly as 'digital infrastructures' (van Dijck et al 2018) that are shaping not only working and

consumption patterns but also urban space and social relationships in a political way. Since 2015, platform capitalism has completely overturned the bike delivery sector, especially in regard to home meal delivery, and decompartmentalised what was before just a niche sector. Against giants such as Uber or Deliveroo, riders<sup>3</sup> do not remain silent: they are resisting individually and organising legal and collective action through trade unions or autonomous structures (Rubert 2023). Some of these ‘new proletarians’ (Abdelnour and Bernard 2018, Abdelnour 2018) have even organised themselves into cooperatives. To the investor-owned platform utopia of a ‘data-driven business’, counter platform cooperatives (Schölz 2017) oppose the utopia of delivery without exploitation or carbon emissions through rider-owned cooperatives. They also fight against a model built around speculation and commodification of personal data they refuse to collect.

### **State of the art**

In the bike delivery sector, the literature has been structured around three directions. First, a critical sociology of platform work: studies have so far focused mainly on the negative effects of the gig economy (Woodcock and Graham 2019). The rhetoric of the ‘sharing economy’, based on an ideal of community to domesticate the neoliberal market from within (Fotzmaurice et al 2020), has been largely refuted by the increasing number of case studies and comparisons of exploitation in for-profit platforms (Schor and Attwood-Charles 2017). Qualitative research has stressed that ‘platformisation’ undermines working conditions (Jan 2018). Not only does the use of self-employment status (Drahokoupil and Piasna 2017) deprive riders of their social rights, but they are also put in competition by the algorithm that constantly evaluates them. Digitalisation does not improve working conditions, quite the contrary. What the pioneers of delivery companies have presented as the future of work (Carbonell 2022) in fact marks a return to task-based work (Stanford 2017), and amplifies the precarisation of low-skilled workers (Morales Muñoz and Abal Medina 2020, Schor et al 2020). What the advocates of the ‘gig economy’ (Montgomery and Baglioni 2021) present as progress is in fact a step backwards from the point of view of riders. In this ‘economy of laziness’, couriers receive instructions from the application through their smartphone and are constantly monitored by geolocation so much so that they seek to escape or disobey ‘algorithmic management’ (Lee 2018).

The study of these ‘counter-conducts’ and riders’ protests is the second major area of research using the tools of the sociology of social movements. It focuses on individual practices of resistance (Vallas 2019) and strikes that involve disconnecting from the ‘app’ in order to gain labour rights and better working conditions (Cant 2020). These mobilisations sometimes work through existing unions such as the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) but also through ad hoc platforms like the CLAP in Paris (Autonomous Collective of Platform's Riders, Collectif des Livreurs Autonomes des Plateformes in French) or Riders X Derechos (RxD) (‘Rights for Riders’) in Spain. These dynamics of unionisation advocate regulation of the sector. In the context of place-based platforms, couriers’ protests gave rise to collective bargaining at a local and national level but also to international strikes (Johnston 2020; Moares and Betancor Nuez 2023), particularly during the lockdown in 2020 (Cini 2022) in Europe and South America (Gutierrez Crocco and Atzeni 2022).

Auto-organisation and platform cooperatives are also a concrete response to uberisation provided by those who have been affected by it. This third area is in line with research into platform cooperativism, which is not just a digital commons issue (Compain 2021), since it directly involves riders and their working conditions. These platforms combine the digital infrastructure of platforms with the democratic governance and collective ownership inherent to the cooperative tradition.<sup>4</sup> According to the International Co-operative Alliance, a cooperative is ‘an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and

aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise' (ICA 1995). Cooperatives are based on both collective ownership of the means of production (for riders, i.e., the platform) and self-management of the activity according to the principle of 'one member, one vote'; they enable workers to organise production and manage the distribution of profits on an equal footing. Platform cooperativism (Schölz 2016; Fuster Morell et al 2021) aims to help riders take back control of their working tools. These worker-owned platforms are distinct from city-owned platform cooperatives but also cooperatives inside investor-owned platforms (Schölz 2017) which provide riders with labour rights without owning the platform, like the arrangement between Smart and Deliveroo in Belgium in 2016–2018 (Drahokoupil and Piasna 2019). Platform cooperativism has been analysed as a form of 'creative resistance' (Martín et al 2023), 'counter-platform politics' (Benvegnu et al 2021) or 're-embeddedness' (Acosta Alvarado et al 2021; Aufrère et al 2022), the 'counter-movement' by which society is defending itself against commodification in the shape of 'uberisation' (Polanyi 1983 [1944], 88). In the sector of *foodtech* (meals on wheels platform), this 'counter-movement' has taken the form of strikes and legal actions but also in platform cooperativism. For the time being, platform cooperativism has become established mainly in Europe, North America, and other countries like Australia (Kaine and Josserand 2019) but has not been widely implemented in countries of the Global South (Kasparian 2022). The move to cooperative is not without risk: it exposes cooperatives to the perils identified by the degeneration thesis (Pencavel 2002; Maroudas and Rizopoulos 2014). Their growth encourages the division of labour and delegation of power to the detriment of task rotation. Democracy is likewise sacrificed on the altar of efficiency for the sake of economic survival. For small units such as cooperatives, the main difficulty lies in the low margins in a highly competitive sector that relies on network effects. Cooperatives are subject to both internal and external constraints.

The close links between global riders' protests and local platform cooperatives justify bringing these areas of research together. In this respect, *Mensakas* – an expression meaning 'messenger' in Catalan – seems particularly relevant because the Barcelona cooperative was launched by leaders of RxD. It reinforces the hypothesis that setting up a cooperative is a way for riders to continue mobilising by means other than protest and, as such, can be framed as a social movement. Social movement can be defined as a collective and concerted action around a cause (Neveu 2015), in this case, socially fair and low-carbon delivery. From the perspective of both the sociology of social movements and the sociology of work, cooperatives can be approached both as a 'work collective' (Cru 2016) and as a long-term mobilisation. This dual focus means moving between several modes of mobilisation with distinct temporalities: the short, explosive period of protest; the transition to day-to-day self-organisation; and longer-term intercooperation.

The central hypothesis of this article is that by organising themselves into cooperatives, these riders have joined the wider social movement of platform cooperativism, leading to a transformation and politicisation of work. The research question on which this article focuses is: How are cooperative bike delivery platforms taking root and transforming the riders' social movement? The aim is to observe this continuity at both the individual and organisational level of the cooperative as a unit of analysis but also observe the spaces of intercooperation in which *Mensakas* is embedded. The central hypothesis of this article falls within the theoretical framework of re-embeddedness by observing its micro-sociological and organisational, social, and institutional dimensions using an inductive approach.

## Methodology

This article is based on an ethnography carried out within the Barcelona cooperative, *Mensakas*. The process of platformisation is far advanced in Barcelona, making it a 'critical case' where the phenomenon is particularly salient (Cañada et al 2023). In 2015, Glovo was

created in Barcelona and is now one of the largest of such platforms in Spain. Barcelona was also the birthplace of the RxD platform mobilisation, which has spread nationwide. In addition, bike delivery cooperatives have been springing up in the Catalan capital for several years now (Fuster Morell and Espelt 2018), which can also be explained by the city's strong cooperative tradition. It is therefore an ideal area for observation 'to examine nascent and alternative social innovations in the platform economy' (Cañada et al 2023).

To date, Mensakas has given rise to a significant number of comparative studies (Martín et al 2023) or virtual ethnographies (Fernández and Barreiro 2020). The problem with approaches that focus on discourses produced and published on social networks or media, or collected through interviews, is that they depend on discourses of 'self-presentation' and do not allow us to grasp the gap between discourse and practice. In the bike delivery sector, very few studies are based on ethnography (Rubert 2023), except for those using 'autoethnography'<sup>5</sup> (Lemozy 2019; Heiland 2021). The advantage of the method of participant observation is that it enables us to gain 'knowledge by body' (Bourdieu 1980) and to produce 'thick descriptions' (Geertz 1973).

Between December 2022 and September 2023, I worked as a rider several days a week and participated in general assemblies, training sessions, and more informal occasions. Taking part in the rides provides a position from which to observe the work in progress and makes it possible to triangulate the data with the interviews (n=12) and the cooperative's archives that give an account of the economic, administrative, and political reality of the cooperative. Long-term immersion enabled me to get an insider's view of the customs and norms of the riders' social world. It is also a way of conducting in-depth interviews based on questions that emerge from observation and the experience shared with the riders. The data collection was supplemented by a selection of open sources such as institutional documents, the cooperatives social networks, and press interviews.

I also moved around the Coopcycle network and worked occasionally with several cooperatives in Madrid (La Pajara), Vitoria-Gasteiz (Eraman), and Rennes (Les Coursiers Rennais). I also met the Barcelona cooperative Les Mercedes, with whom I conducted a group interview with the four co-founders. Finally, I took part in several Coopcycle training courses as part of the Erasmus Plus Youth programme, attended the general meeting in August 2023, and conducted several interviews with the employees, president, and founder. This case study, focusing on Barcelona, is therefore part of a comparative ethnography. The names of the riders who agreed to take part in the survey (I had two refusals from co-founders) have all been changed to preserve their anonymity.<sup>6</sup> The paper begins by looking back at the conditions under which Mensakas emerged from RxD (I). It then analyses the everyday challenges met by the Barcelona cooperative from a 'micro' and 'meso' perspective (II). The final section shifts scale to examine the strategies of intercooperation deployed by the Barcelona cooperative as a way of extending mobilisation and consolidating it over time (III).

### ***The militant roots of the Barcelona cooperative***

This first section analyses the conditions under which Mensakas has emerged, from open protests to RxD collective (1) until Riders' Law (2): the media coverage and the legal implications of the battlefield between the riders and the platforms have turned it into a political issue.

#### ***The Riders X Derechos' struggle***

Bike delivery is a solitary job. For platform workers, their main contact is the application distributing the deliveries. Between two rides, they wait on the street corner for an order to come in, alone or with co-workers, subject to the randomness of 'algorithmic

management' (Möhlmann and Henfridsson 2019; Muldoon and Raekstad 2022). But most of the mental, linguistic, and physical operations that make up the daily life of bike riders – pedalling, waiting outside a restaurant, handing over an order to a customer, finding their way around the city, and speaking with customers – corresponds to time spent alone. This geographical dispersal across urban areas where 'gig economy' platforms operate (Woodcock and Graham 2019; Wood et al 2021) make riders' mobilisation all the more 'unlikely' (Collovald and Mathieu 2009) as they are pitted against each other by algorithmic scoring (Moares 2022: 189). This concept refers to mobilisation by social groups and actors with limited resources, whether in terms of time, money, or organisational skills (Collovald and Mathieu 2009). But the field of collective action is not driven by mechanical laws.

In 2017, hundreds of riders were already roaming the streets of Barcelona. Before the shift or between deliveries, they meet up, chatting, or even playing football. This is the case with Deliveroo, which divides the city into several zones with starting points to which riders must return to between deliveries. Aldo, a former Deliveroo rider and member of Mensakas sees this 'zonification' as a 'strategic error on the part of the company', since it makes it easier for riders to get in touch with each other (Interview with Aldo, 29 years old, Mensakas member for 4 years, June 2023, Barcelona). All it takes, is for one courier to raise the issue of working conditions for the protest to spread. The Barcelona example shows that assigning zones has provided riders with a resource and confirms the place-based nature of social movements (Hmed 2008). In the case of meals on wheels platforms, physical proximity is a valuable resource for building relationships and weaving bonds (Heiland 2021). Moreover, riders also communicate in their own Telegram groups in parallel with the discussion channels controlled and monitored by the platforms. This is how both the first Spanish protests of the summer of 2017 and the UK protests of 2016 emerged (Tassinari and Maccarrone 2020) but it occurred also in France and Denmark's cities (Hau and Savage 2022). The number of bike demonstrations is increasing, along with musical gatherings in front of the platforms' headquarters to the sounds of the song *Riders on the storm*<sup>7</sup> (Soto Aliaga 2023). Barcelona's riders are also organising disconnection strikes by shutting down their apps together. The 'repertoire of action' (Tilly 1984) characteristic of conflicts at work – strikes, demonstrations, petitions – is adjusting to the platformisation of bike delivery.

In 2017, the level of conflict went up a level with the creation of RxD with the support of Intersindical Alternativa de Catalunya (IAC). RxD quickly spread in seven Spanish cities nationwide. The platform became one of the cornerstones of the fight against uberisation alongside trade unions such as UGT (General Labour Union), CCOO (Workers' Commissions), and CGT (General Confederation of Labour). The creation of this mobilisation platform highlights the lateness of unions, which are not at all established in investor-owned platforms. It stresses the mismatch between labour and legal institutions on the one hand, and the moving reality of work on the other.

RxD's main demands concerned minimum wage and social security cover in the case of an accident at work and better access to shifts (with a minimum of 20 hours a week) controlled by the evaluations and calculations of the algorithm. Facing this, platforms like Glovo or Deliveroo were dismissing leaders and anyone involved during the summer of 2017. These dismissals took the form of outright disconnection without notice or possibility of appeal. The platforms also did away with zoning and changed the tariff structure to payments per delivery (instead of payments per hour) to make couriers move to areas of high demand and avoid meetings. In fact, the platforms' response has also taken the form of counter-mobilisation, with the creation of pro-entrepreneurship ('*pro-autonomos*' in Spanish) associations such as Adigital and Govup. These 'yellow' unions are very close to the platforms which fund them: 'at their head is a president rider with a privileged position in the company who sets the terms of payment and entry to the association' (Soto Aliaga 2023, 38). Examples include Asorider (Asociacion Espanola de

Riders Mensajeros), the Asociación Autónoma de Riders (AAR), or RepartidoresUnidos.Org. For the platforms, they are an effective way of monitoring what is happening from the inside, to prevent mobilisation (e.g., bonuses during mobilisations or disconnection of people protesting) and defend the *status quo*.

Between RxD and the associations, there is a struggle not only to represent riders but also to define the situation. The rhetoric of self-entrepreneurship is matched by a political critique of the ‘gig economy’. RxD contrasts the lexical field of the so-called ‘sharing economy’ with that of class struggle and labour conflict: ‘disconnection’ versus ‘lay-offs’, ‘collaborator’ versus ‘employee’, and so on (Fernandez and Barrero 2020). These struggles over the meaning and definition of the situation are exacerbated by the trials and legal actions initiated by dismissed riders.

Indeed, in Spain, there is a double front in the struggle against the ‘Uber’ platforms, with around 70 individual or collective legal actions (more than 347 at the international level, according to the transnational federation of Couriers in 2023). These actions follow on from the investigations carried out by the Labour Inspectorate and raise questions about the existence of subordination such as to establish a salaried relationship between riders and platforms.<sup>8</sup> Despite few court rulings in favour of platforms, around 50 legal actions in Spain have recognised riders’ rights. On the one hand, judges recognise an infringement of fundamental rights, in particular trade union rights, and cancel the dismissals, giving the workers the right to compensation and reintegration. Secondly, and this is the most critical point, they highlight the key role of the algorithm as the main work tool (and not the bike). After being rejected by the Higher Court in Spain, a former Glovo rider won his case before the Supreme Court. The highest court in the Spanish legal system has characterised the relationship of dependence based on a series of clues demonstrating ‘the integration of the workers into the business organisation’.<sup>9</sup> It is acknowledged that the traditional figure of the chief has been replaced by an automated process by an algorithm that belongs to the companies and not to the riders. In Barcelona, the course of these trials demonstrates the anchorage of RxD in the ‘space of social movements’ (Mathieu 2009) with the presence of several *mareas*<sup>10</sup> (La Parra-Perez 2014) and the association of maids *las Kellys*<sup>11</sup> who provide their support even in the courtrooms. Internationally, RxD holds a central position in the riders’ cause, as evidenced by the organisation of the Second Transnational Federation of Couriers (created in October 2018) conference in Barcelona in April 2019.

### *The Riders’ Law*

It is on the grounds of this jurisprudence that RxD was going to support its demand for the regulation of the bike delivery sector. The conflict then took on a legislative and political dimension. Alongside street actions and judicial actions, lobbying is the third lever used by the platform to demand rights for riders. This is not limited to the national level, with actions on a European scale, as was the case in December 2019 with a collective speech to the European Parliament. The formation of a socialist coalition government in January 2020 opened a ‘window of opportunity’ to translate this jurisprudence into legislative stone. Negotiations with Yolanda Diaz’s Ministry of Labour and Social Economy began in summer 2020. In addition to RxD, talks involved the UGT, CCOO, and CEOE (Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations) unions and gave rise to counter-mobilisations by pro-platform associations, both in the public arena and on social networks with the hashtag #dehentrabajar (literally, ‘let us work!’). It is worth noting that the Spanish far right has also protested the Riders’ Law,<sup>12</sup> promoted by the left-wing coalition government.

During my first visit to the Barcelona cooperative, Juanxto told me that he and others ‘*companerxs*’ had done a lot of work on the Riders’ Law and they had gone to the Minister’s office to co-write the law, even though he deplored that the law only concerned riders and

not all ‘*autonomos*’ (Fieldwork note, 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2022). Indeed, this was one of the criticisms levelled by the RxD even before the law was promulgated on 12 August 2021. The Riders’ Law establishes a presumption of salaried status for riders (reversing the burden of proof) and gives them access to information about algorithms.

It is a regulation law unprecedented in Europe. But its implementation is producing only limited effects due to the lack of sufficient resources for the Labour and Social Security Inspection and the difficulty of setting up unions in the self-employed platforms. Nonetheless, in 2023, the Riders’ Law has produced various effects on investor-owned platforms: Deliveroo has left Spain, Uber Eats is using Temporary Employment Companies (*Empresas de Trabajo Temporal*, ETT) which allows easy dismissal, while Glovo is still disobeying the law. In September 2023, the Catalan giant was fined 200 million euros for continuing to employ ‘*falsos autonomos*’ and for illegally renting accounts to undocumented people. At the same time, unionisation of Glovo led to the implementation of its first works council.

But the mobilisation against platforms is not limited to this long legal and legislative battle. Some riders prefer to leave rather than try to change working conditions within the platforms, organising themselves into cooperatives. In Barcelona, after the step of the voice, this collective *exit* (Hirschman 1972) led to the creation of Mensakas (messenger or rider in Catalan), where several ‘mobilisation entrepreneurs’ (Broqua and Fillieule 2009) became ‘cooperative entrepreneurs’ (Sandoval 2020). Several of them have even set up the Observatory of Work, Algorithms and Society<sup>13</sup> (*Observatorio de Trabajo, Algoritmo y Sociedad* – TAS), which lists legal actions and collects data on how algorithms work in all the sectors concerned with uberisation. By giving rise to the figure of the ‘rider-investigator’, this practice is a way of making the relationship between work and algorithms a public issue (Neveu and François 2015). The Observatory is also a key player in the Spanish counter-uberisation movement, having filed the first penal action against Glovo for infringement of employment rights in October 2023.

Moreover, there is an umbilical link between the Barcelona-based cooperative and RxD. For example, the photo of RxD is on display in the basement workshop of Mensakas’ local. It shows several members of RxD holding up banners at the European Parliament during a meeting with the European Commission on 13 December 2019. The commitment to the struggle is visible right down to the body markings. One of the leaders of the cooperative and RxD, Natalia, wears a tattoo representing RxD on her forearm: a pedalboard with two cranks that cross in the centre to symbolise the solidarity of the riders.

In this first part, we have seen that the conflict between riders and platforms has been played out in several media, legal and parliamentary arenas. Demonstrations start in the streets and squares, move to the headquarters of the platforms, and extend to the judicial and political arenas. In theory, regulation makes it possible to re-socialise delivery work through social security contributions and to improve working conditions. But its effects remain limited, as shown by the difficulty of enforcing the Riders’ Law. RxD also gave birth to Mensakas, a reminder that the process of ‘double movement’ (Goodwin 2018) is multi-directional: the challenge is to create viable alternatives that are no longer embedded in the logic of financial speculation based on data.

### **Everyday challenges of counter-platform**

Mensakas was founded in 2018 by former platform riders from RxD. This worker-owned platform was launched thanks to a crowdfunding campaign which relied mainly on individual donations. The cooperative has also benefited from public action schemes on a local and regional scale, providing decisive financial support.<sup>14</sup> It initially delivered hot meals to homes like investor-owned platforms before specialising in last-mile delivery since 2019. Last-mile delivery is the final step in the delivery chain, from a hub to the final

customer. The cooperative began developing its own application before joining the Coopcycle network and using the software of the same name. As a Catalan Limited Cooperative Society (*Societat Cooperativa Catalana Limitada*), Mensakas is classified as a non-profit cooperative. This means that profits are re-invested in the project instead of being redistributed among the members who are all salaried and equal-paid. This second section extends the hypothesis of a ‘counter-platform politics’ on an empirical level (Benvegnu et al 2021), examining the transformation of delivery work (2) and the way riders redefine their labour in a political way (1).

### *Cargo bike Politics*

A carrier-based approach (Becker 2006) – which combines objective dimensions (succession of status and jobs) and subjective dimensions (individual’s signification) – shows that several mobilisation entrepreneurs have become cooperative entrepreneurs. Mensakas is not an isolated case; it is also the case of *La Pajara*, in Madrid, whose president was a member of RxD (interview with Mario, January 2023, former president of *La Pajara*, Madrid). They are not ‘secant marginals’ but pioneers of the co-ops in Barcelona and Madrid. However, not all Mensakas members come from RxD: in 2023, they represent barely a quarter of the workforce, that is 4 out of 16 people. This can be explained by a significant turnover, even though Mensakas is organised around a hard nucleus.

What’s more, RxD remains a gateway to Mensakas, even for those who did not take part. Rafael, 29, is Mexican and has been living in Barcelona for 7 years. He is a circus performer and worked for a cleaning company in a food market before working informally for a delivery platform. He also took part in a mobilisation to legalise a squat (*okupa*) in which he now lives with his family. He has now been working for Mensakas for 2 years, having joined the coop after a cycle training course organised by RxD and a socio-educational association in Barcelona (Interview with Rafael, member of Mensakas for 3 years, March 2023). Riders’ struggle is also a vector for professional socialisation. Although he was not part of RxD, Jacinto, aged 30 years, also mobilised against foodtech platforms through the Confederation Générale du Travail (CGT). He joined the union and worked for a private delivery company (not a platform) before joining Mensakas (Interview with Jacinto, member of Mensakas for 6 months, June 2023).

It is not just former riders who find Mensakas an opportunity to recycle their professional skills (interview with Diego, 37, member for 2 years, May 2023): delivery work is part of other commitment that goes beyond the fight against capitalist platforms. This is the case of Salvador, 44, a photographer by profession, who promotes the ‘cause of bicycle’ by taking part to various initiatives such as the ‘Bicibus’.<sup>15</sup> Like other Mensakas, he also frequents the ‘critical masses’ and campaigns for a greater place for bikes in the city. The collective practice of ‘critical mass’ is a way of demonstrating in urban spaces by cycling at a moderate pace, to music, with flags or political signs in order to occupy public space, especially roads. They bring together bike users who are campaigning for more sustainable mobility slowing down car traffic. These gatherings are commonplace in Spain, particularly in Barcelona where there are even critical masses for kids. Salvador analyses cycling and cycle logistics in the light of changing mobility patterns: ‘*The phrase I always say is that I believe that mobility, the “last mile”, must change and that I want to contribute to it*’ (Interview with Salvador, photographer, and member for 6 months, June 2023). As well as delivering, Salvador also takes pictures for the cooperative’s communication on social networks and looks after the mechanical maintenance of the bikes.

Even if the work is physically demanding, sometimes even exhausting when it is raining or windy, the cooperative project is winning significant endorsement. For Andrew, 41, a graphic designer, ‘*Mensakas is still a side-job (he only works one day a week) but it’s also, and above all, an alternative to the system, with all the limitations that entails*’ (interview with



Andrew, Mensakas for 4 years, May 2023). Work becomes a means of commitment. This is a constant theme throughout the interviews to understand the intensity of the time and energy commitment of riders in the field for a salary that remains modest. Members must contribute 1000 euros to the share capital and are all paid the same (the minimum wage per hour since March 2023 and the 2023 re-evaluation, 1080 euros per month), with 5% extra for women. This is a symbolic measure of compensation for a salary gap and for the harassment regularly suffered by women delivering in the street. During informal conversations, women regularly talk about sexist remarks from men who, for example, cast doubt on their ability to carry so much weight. Although there are fewer women than men in Mensakas, recruitment is gendered to ensure a balanced workforce, which is very rare in the very male-dominated messenger world.

With an average age of 32 years, riders work between 10 and 25 hours a week, or 2 to 4 days a week; most have few family obligations. The team is predominantly male and Spanish, although there are several people who have emigrated from South America and Mexico. Spanish is therefore mixed with Catalan in the verbal and written exchanges on the Telegram channels used to communicate daily. All of them, without exception, do something else alongside their work as riders: delivery is part of a continuum of activities, both paid and unpaid: photography, screen printing, crafting bike equipment, graphism, circus arts, studies, and journalism. This pluriactivity evokes the situation of ‘slashers’ (Bohas et al 2018) who voluntarily combine several paid or unpaid activities with delivery, generally, their main activity and revenue. In any case, the ‘Mensakas’ have a more expressive relationship with their work, which differentiates them from the ‘utilitarian’ (Jan 2018) profiles of investor-owned platforms, who have a more instrumental relationship to labour. Riders emphasise the fact that working with their bodies and cycling around the city is already a source of motivation and satisfaction, even if it does not pay enough (they’re paid the Spanish minimum wage). This stability remains precarious from a material point of view and is perceived as such: at a workshop organised with Coopcycle as part of the ‘Coopcycle academy’ training funded by Erasmus Plus for the newcomers (the second-generation) of coops, a large majority of those present felt that they should be paid one and a half to twice as much (Fieldnote, June 2023). The shift to cooperative does not make the work any less intense: the workdays are long, with frequent overtime often due to last-minute orders.

*‘Struggle and self-management’:<sup>16</sup> the political metamorphosis of delivery through cooperation*

According to the data presented at the Coopcycle General Meeting in August 2023, 69.6% of Mensakas’ activity is devoted to delivery, 10.6% to dispatch, 7.0% to meeting times, 5.2% to human resources, 3.5% to communications and 2.6% to accounting (outsourced). These figures do not reflect any discrepancies between prescribed and actual work. As was pointed out during their presentation to other cooperatives in the GA of Coopcycle, they do not show unpaid reproductive hours either. This is a recurring debate at the General Assembly of Mensakas which reflects the difficult balance between economic and political activity. At an individual level, the same tension runs through riders who have the ‘dual quality’ of employee and associate (Desroche 1982). The day-to-day life of cooperative is a constant balancing act between these two dimensions thanks to informal discussions and general assemblies. We understand better why conflicts do not only arise from the organisation of work but also come from the external pressures. One recurring issue concerns the customer portfolio and ‘the acceptable degree of modification of the initial objectives in order to guarantee the survival of the cooperative’ (Maroudas and Rizopoulos 2014). For example, is it acceptable to work with customers who are not part of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) network and who just want to make profit?

This collective management of work breaks with the hierarchy of platforms divided between investors and workers. It is like the assembly-based organisation of social

movements that is widespread in Spain. In line with the cooperative principles of collective ownership and self-management, General Assembly is based on consensus. There is a division of labour between the Rector's Council which implements the decisions of the AGM, a chairwoman, who acts as the legal representative, and a few departments responsible for operational matters: commercial, mechanical, dispatch, subsidies, deliveries, risk prevention in workplace and intercooperation. This structure does not prevent more informal decision-making and leadership dynamics, particularly on the part of the co-founders who come from RxD, by virtue of their long-standing experience. The division of labour remains relatively rigid, with little rotation of tasks even though almost everyone delivers.

The shift to cooperative has considerably transformed the content of the activity, compared with that at the beginning. Food delivery accounts for only a very small percentage of the business (only a few local restaurants of the SSE), which is nowadays centred on the delivery of vegetables from growers, consumer associations or organic supermarkets for private customers (B2C), or from mushroom, cakes, or coffee producers for restaurants (B2B). Mensakas works mainly with restaurants affiliated to the SSE network, with local businesses and grassroots producers, and with linked-minded value partners. Since 2022, the "coop" has been doing most of its business with *Talkual*, a company that markets vegetables rejected by supermarkets.<sup>17</sup>

The move to the last-mile sector is transforming the methods, rhythms and constraints of delivery, which is no longer instantaneous but scheduled in advance. Mensakas only delivers during the day, 5 days a week, sometimes on Saturdays. A typical day consists of preparing the electrically assisted cargo bikes (they can transport almost 100kg, even more for load specialists) by checking the batteries, unloading the truck collectively with the vegetable crates (there are between 3 and 5 pallets, e.g., between 100 and 200 crates), organising the distribution of the crates in the hub before each person organises their own load. The routes have been prepared in advance by the dispatchers and include between 2 and 5 routes. This is a major change compared with the platforms, since the allocation of routes is manual rather than automatic. This means that the distribution of work is manual and requires a deep knowledge of the city and individual skills: for example, the fastest couriers are sent to the most remote areas ('Mordor' in reference to the movie *The Lords of the Rings*), while others, like Rafael, are renowned for their ability to carry heavy, bulky loads. Ideally, the dispatchers also consider the riders' state of fatigue and optimise the routes. So, the transformation of the business does not just concern its content, but a whole series of tasks upstream and downstream of delivery – shipping, bike maintenance, administrative and reproductive work, human resources management, sales work, communication on social networks and public relations. These require a wide range of skills, not just the ability to ride a cargo bike.

Some of these skills come from the RxD platform, such as legal knowledge of employment law and risk prevention in the workplace. For those who come from struggle, it may also include the ability to deal with the media, to speak in public or to master institutional language. But these know-how and competencies also come from other contexts, whether scholarly, professional, or associative, which are readjusted to the situation. The cooperative is also, and above all, a place for acquiring skills and knowledge, particularly in terms of learning the 'last mile'. It is not just a question of delivering from point A to point B, but of handling, organising, and optimising your cargo (the so-called 'Tetris') and finding your way around the city. Riders must deliver on time but also deal with unexpected events (customer absence and battery failure). Handling is an energy-intensive part of the job, whether it is securing the load before a delivery round or dropping it off at the customer's door. This 'work of displacement' ('travail de déplacement' in French; Tranchant 2019) is blending with phases of cycling, which are the most enjoyable part of the job, according to the riders and as studies into

**Table 1.** Work organisation in investor-owned and rider-owned platforms

	Investor-owned platforms	Rider-owned platforms
Business model	Data-driven business at a global scale	No data collect and local SSE
Dispatch	Automatised by algorithm	Self-management and manual dispatch
Empowerment	Deskilling process	Skills enhancement
Workplace relations	Competition	Cooperation
Sectorial relations	« Winner take-all »	Intercooperation

psychodynamics of work have shown (Lemozy 2019). Riders are constantly striving for efficiency and deploy strategies to avoid riding empty (picking up a parcel on the way home) or taking the shortest route possible. Acquiring these skills is a process that takes several months like Juanxto said to me my first day. It involves a ‘work of incorporation’ that I report in my fieldnote:

*I become aware of the automatisms that are put in place through these ritualised operations that are repeated: loading the last crates of the round first, securing them properly on the bike, finding my bearings and orienting myself in the urban space, attaching the bike before carrying the parcel to the customer’s door . . . (Observations of 21 March 2023).*

The main difference with investor-owned platforms is this process of professionalisation. It does not involve only reaffiliation (Castel 2014), social protection, and employment status but also implies becoming a delivery professional. Delivery is no longer just a livelihood but becomes a real profession based on skills – geographical, physical, and mental – and know-how (Linhart 2015: 37). This professionalism is a major difference compared to the rhetoric of capitalist platforms that present delivery as a ‘hobby’ for young people. Professionalisation contrasts with deskilling processes due to fragmentation of work in profit-driven platforms.

The gap also arises in the way work is organised. Remuneration does not depend on the number of deliveries or kilometres covered, nor on any kind of rating. Real-time geolocation by the dispatch software does not give rise to any evaluation of the couriers’ performance. In other words, there is no competition between riders, who are incentivised to help each other. Before the shift, dispatchers remind riders to give a hand to those who are overworked in Telegram channels. These instructions produce concrete results: it is often the case that some taking charge of deliveries for a colleague, coming to help someone out with a puncture, picking up a packet, and taking it back to the hub.

The collective work arrangements also break the isolation of every courier, who meet up at the premises, between two routes or to eat. Lunch breaks are special times for ‘getting back to yourself’ (Hatzfeld 2002) but also for talking, sharing time, and strengthening the ‘work collective’ (Cru 2016). Obviously, the collective also manifests itself during General Assembly, where decisions are taken collectively on the cooperative’s strategic direction. If democracy at work is costly in terms of time and energy, it produces an ‘overgenerating effect’ (Sawicki and Siméant 2009) that strengthens support for the project. But we need to pay close attention to what happens on a day-to-day basis in interactions that may seem insignificant, but which fuel collective identification processes: it is also behind the scenes, after shifts or over a few beers and peanuts, that conflicts are settled. In this sense, the local is not just a hub to store parcels waiting to be delivered (it has a cold room): it is also a space of sociability. Here is a comparative table of the work organisation between investor-owned platforms and rider-owned platforms (Table 1).

It should be pointed out that this table has an ideal-typical value, that is, it only reflects the observed reality through differences and comparisons. It does not exist in a chemically pure state, and it would be a mistake to oppose social logic to market logic. While Mensakas focuses on local producers and SSE shops, the Barcelona-based coop is constantly exposed to pressure from the local market, restaurants, and shops that negotiate prices or send last-minute orders. The challenge to build a sustainable alternative is therefore a constant compromise between social logic and market logic, which reminds us there is ‘no market economy separated from the political sphere’ (Polanyi 1983 (1944), 259). The first two lines stress the difference in business model and work organisation between data-driven business and platform cooperative. The next two lines compare the effects of this organisation on riders and workplace relationships (competition and cooperation). The last line compares the sectoral relationships: on the one hand, competition between investor-owned platforms, and on the other, the cooperation between rider-owned platforms.

### **Long-term mobilisation through intercooperation**

Riders’ reappropriation of the means of production obviously involves collective ownership of the bikes, which are particularly expensive for the ‘last mile’ (between €3,000 and €7,000 for each electric cargo bike). But the main difference with Uber-type platforms lies in the way work is distributed. Gone are the days of automatic algorithms issuing orders and extracting data: the delivery co-operators allocate journeys manually, drawing on their experience and knowledge of the terrain and their colleagues. To do this, Mensakas uses Coopcycle software. Coopcycle refers more broadly to a strategy of intercooperation<sup>18</sup> on a transnational scale that enables resources to be pooled (1): this is not the only resource mobilised by Mensakas, which is part of a local ecosystem of cooperatives (2).

### **Coopcycle: from the app to the international federation**

Coopcycle is not just software that enables cooperatives to manage their deliveries or put them in touch with different types of customers (Business-to-Business or Business-to-Customers), through using a web platform or mobile application. It is also a space of intercooperation. Coopcycle (Acosta Alvarado et al 2021; Le Lay and Lemozy 2023) is an international federation with more than 70 cooperatives mainly in Europe but also in Mexico and North America – implementation is progress in Argentina (Kasparian 2022). This network was set up in 2016 during the social movement against the ‘labour law’ in France (a deregulation law of labour rights), more specifically during the Nuit debout ‘square movements’ (Guionnet and Wieviorka 2021) – comparable to Occupy Wall Street in the United States. Like other ‘square movements’ (Guichoux 2022), Nuit debout was organised into assemblies and working groups. Arnaud, a computer developer of 33 years in 2016, helped with the organisation of the camp and joined the ‘Numérique’ commission, which discussed mainly the negative effects of Uber-type platforms. Although ‘Republic Square’ is a meeting point for Parisian couriers, it was only later that Arnaud contacted riders campaigning against platforms with other companions of Nuit debout. Already an open-source advocate, he set about developing software on his own while documenting himself on platforms. In particular, he read the work of platform cooperativism theorists such as Trebor Schözl. His technical skills were combined with other legal and activist skills in the group that emerged and met every week in 2017. The idea was to make software-as-a-service available in the spirit of the commons (Interview with Arnaud, founder of Coopcycle, October 2023).

However, none of the core Coopcycle members was a rider: they are like ‘activists by conscience’ (Sommier 2003) who bring together their IT, legal, and activist skills. This is how the Coopcycle application came about, under a reciprocal licence. The specific feature

of this Copyfair licence is that use of the platform is conditional on members respecting the cooperative principles of democracy at work (as defined by the SSE) and ensuring that riders' income is socialised (salaried employment or social security contributions). This relatively flexible system makes it possible to adjust to legal frameworks in different countries and facilitates the expansion of the network.

Riders can involve themselves in the design of the App through feedback from the field (reporting bugs and areas for improvement), especially through Slack's channels.<sup>19</sup> The association has gradually been restructured around members' cooperatives with an elected board representing the different countries. It is based on the principle of 'one cooperative, one vote', with each cooperative contributing 2.5% of its net profits.<sup>20</sup> This funding is used to pay the salaries of a permanent team of eight people and to pool operational, insurance, and commercial services. But above all, Coopcycle is a network to share cyclelogistical experiences. In 2019, Mensakas decided to develop last mile (interview with Natalia, founder and president of Mensakas, May 2023) after visiting the *Olvo* cooperative<sup>21</sup> in Paris which was specialised in this sector. The General Assembly is also a 'desingularisation operator' to share local experiences, identify recurring problems, and find solutions.

Coopcycle is part of the social movement of platform cooperativism, which is organised around stakeholders with 'resource-persons' (like Trebor Schözl and Nathan Schneider who wrote in 2017 *Ours to hack and to own: The rise of platform cooperativism, a new vision for the future of work and a fairer internet*), networks (such as the Platform Cooperativism Consortium, which funds research into the digital transition of cooperatives), and institutional support. It should also be noted that Coopcycle forms a hub for intercooperation and receives a great deal of institutional support at local, national (ADEME, the French Ecological Transition Agency), and European levels.<sup>22</sup>

In June 2023, the federation coordinated the #DeliverChange campaign, which called for a reduction in carbon emissions by targeting Amazon. Born of struggle, this 'multinational anarcho-communist start-up'<sup>23</sup> continues to take up the 'cause of riders'.<sup>24</sup> But not all Coopcycle's cooperatives are the outcome of struggle, which qualifies our initial hypothesis (Interview with Peter, President of Coopcycle and Eraman, May 2023). It remains valid in the case of Mensakas, which has a militant identity and a strong political dimension that has earned it a positive reputation within the federation and at local level.

### *The Archipelago strategy of intercooperation*

If we look back to the Barcelona cooperative, we see that it is not the only intercooperation scheme (Snrec 2018). Mensakas pulls other levers on a local and regional scale. It relies on local networks at neighbourhood level, such as the Sants and Neighbourhoods Restaurant Group (*Grup de Restauradores de Sants i Barris Veïns* in catalan); it also cooperates with consumer associations conveying food and many civic centres (*ateneus*). Above all, Mensakas has benefited from the support of the Coòpolis cooperative. The cooperative provides Mensakas with their second local, an old hardware store, at a price below the Barcelona housing market. Coopolis presents itself as 'a laboratory for intercooperation and local economic reinforcement': it is a semi-institutional structure that promotes the SSE in the city of Barcelona and is part of a Catalan cooperative network. Coopolis is linked to Barcelona City Hall's public policy on SSE. It is part of the Barcelona 2030 SSE strategy (following on from the 2016–2019 SSE Plan), which provides for the creation of a cooperative centre in Barcelona, located in Can Battló, in the Sants district, not far from the Mensakas local. Can Battló is home to more than 80 cooperatives. We have to also mention the Bicihub association, which was set up in 2019 by several founders of bike delivery cooperatives and whose workshop provides technical support.

Last but not least, Mensakas has played a decisive role in the second-level cooperative Som Ecologisticas ('We are Ecologistics'). This 'cooperative of cooperatives' has benefited from the *Singulars* ('unique projects') public action programme, Catalonia Regional Government's public policy of support for the cooperative sector, which aims to boost employment and strengthen intercooperation. 'Som ecologisticas' aims is to spread cycle logistics (Wrighton and Reiter 2016) in Catalonia. After being put on hold, it was relaunched in 2021 and now includes various co-ops, organisations, and companies: Granollers Pedala, Mensakas, Las Mercedes, La Sàrria, L'Henbici, CoopdePedal, the Pare Manel Foundation, Trèvol Missatgers, and the Formation and Work Foundation. This second-level cooperative provides training and information. It pools resources by allocating riders from one cooperative to another according to needs (Fieldnote, September 2023) or by group purchases of cargo bikes. They act as an interface with big customers, while also providing representation to institutions, as demonstrated by the speech made by the former president and future president of 'Som Ecologisticas' – who is also president of Mensakas – to the Catalan Parliament on 19 January 2023.<sup>25</sup> This regional level makes it possible to formalise territorial synergies and multiply strategies of intercooperation.

Previous research has already shown that platform cooperatives face many challenges, such as raising capital or gaining institutional support (Bunders et al 2022). In this sense, intercooperation makes it possible to achieve economies of scale. Several times a week, one or two Mensakas go to work with another cooperative of Som Ecologisticas, Les Mercedes, and use their tricycles to deliver to the inner city. The Mercedes were bike tour guides who switched to delivery during the COVID-19 lockdown. Unlike Mensakas, they do not come from platforms and have developed their coop around home food delivery; they also do 'last mile' (interview with the 4 co-founders of Mercedes, May 2023). The idea of intercooperation is also to divide up the work *between* the cooperatives, as was the case during the summer of 2023 when riders from a nearby cooperative (*L'henbici* in L'Hospitalet in Barcelona suburb), that was also member of Coopcycle, came to give a hand to Mensakas<sup>26</sup>. Intercooperation also makes it possible to handle volumes and meet orders that a single cooperative could not meet on its own. It allows for the pooling of resources and benefits from the network effect to reach a critical mass of customers.

Intercooperation combines reciprocity (the horizontal principle of symmetry) and redistribution (the principle of asymmetry with public authorities). There is therefore an institutional dimension to re-embeddedness (Nowak and Raffaelli 2022), which raises the question of the institutional conditions in cooperative ecosystems. SSE is very institutionalised in BCN with municipal agencies (Barcelona Activa) and offices (the Directorate of Social and Solidarity Economy Services and Sustainable Food and the Department of the Social and Solidarity Economy). Public authorities play a key role through their financial support, which requires bureaucratic skills to catch public funding (monitoring public calls; putting together applications, etc.). This is what Coopcycle achieved by winning the Erasmus Plus Youth programme in 2022. This is also one of the recurring tasks of Mensakas, which is not always visible or paid for.

Public funding programmes compensate for the lack of profitability but are also a political choice. They give cooperatives greater visibility in the mid-term, even if this remains time-consuming. At a local level, institutional support depends on the balance of political power and the outcome of electoral competition for power. Between 2015 and 2023, a left-wing political party led the Barcelona city council (*Barcelona en Comu*), with the mayor, Ada Caulo, coming from the social movement for the right to housing, which can explain a policy in favour of the SSE. In addition to regulation and direct funding, public authorities also have an indirect role to play in cycle logistics through public policy. Firstly, by providing adequate cycling infrastructure, as is the case in Barcelona with its solid network of bike track. Secondly, by ensuring access to public contracts that guarantee

regular orders, as has been the case since September 2023, when Mensakas began delivering daily to several school canteens (Field notes, September 2023).

## Conclusion

How is Mensakas pursuing the mobilisation against platform capitalism? The question addressed in this article is similar to that of the institutionalisation of social movements and their consequences (Chabanet and Giugni 2010). We have seen, through several multi-positional cases among the founders, that there is a close link between the Barcelona cooperative and RxD which is still active. As well as taking action in the courts, the mobilisation platform has established itself as a legitimate interlocutor with the Spanish government. Initially, RxD focused on judicial battles and achieved legislative changes through Riders' Law, which nevertheless remains limited in its tangible effects.<sup>27</sup> Mobilisation then shifted from protest to the social movement of platform cooperativism through the creation of Mensakas. In the Barcelona cooperative, we have seen that political socialisation and professional socialisation are intertwined.

Mensakas represents a shift from merely fighting against an adversary on its own ground, to creating an alternative within the bike delivery sector. The switch to the cooperative model can be interpreted as an interstitial strategy (Wright 2017) on the margins of platform capitalism. Achieving the utopian goal of carbon-free, farm-free deliveries is a constant compromise, both within the cooperative and with its environment. By its small size, this type of strategy risks being no more than a safety valve in a highly competitive sector with low profits. Intercooperation strategies provide a response to this risk of isolation. This 'counter-platform' is part of a local, regional, and transnational cooperative ecosystem with the Coopcycle federation, which continues to grow after 6 years in existence.

The case of Mensakas raises the social, political, territorial, and institutional issues surrounding the re-embeddedness in the bike delivery sector. This experience also highlights the difficulties of building a sustainable and profitable alternative in bike delivery, even if the financial viability of the cooperative, which is a burning issue for the riders, falls outside the scope of this article and would require an in-depth analysis of economic data. Otherwise, there are limits to the generalisation of this case study.

A more global approach reveals contrasts between cooperative bike delivery platforms, if only at the level of Coopcycle. Not all the cooperatives come from the struggle against the platforms: for some, cooperativism is a way of continuing their courier career by other means in an entrepreneurial perspective. Not all cooperatives adopt the same strategies. While Mensakas, like other cooperatives in Barcelona, has helped to create alternative delivery networks, other cooperatives – like Eraman in Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain) and Les Coursiers Rennais in Rennes (France) – focus on hot meal delivery and still use self-employed status for tax reasons. They are more directly competing with Uber-type platforms. The case of these two medium-sized cities also raises the question of the impact of city size on development strategies. These different positions are also a reminder that there are several political visions circulating in the Coopcycle federation and in the social movement of platform cooperativism in general. A hypothesis to be tested in future research on platform cooperativism in bike delivery would be that of a segmentation between an 'alternative' model focused on 'last mile' and the SSE, and an 'entrepreneurial' model focused on home catering in more direct competition with investor-owned platforms.

Mensakas seems to be a 'critical case' of militant cooperative and is underpinned by a favourable environment of which it has been able to take advantage. In addition to a long cooperative tradition in Catalonia, it enjoys the support of the Catalan government and the city for SSE and the digital economy. A more hostile environment, such as that of the city

of Madrid for the La Pajara cooperative, which ceased operations in 2023, would merit further investigation to underline the key role of the public authorities. But context isn't everything: it also and above all comes from the ability of cooperatives to mobilise over the long term and generate support for this concrete utopia. Cooperative platforms are essential stakeholders in what we can call 'cyclelogistics revolution' (Cowen 2014) that is decarbonising supply chains in urban centres and improving working conditions, but they are not the only one. In the context of digitalisation, these counter-platforms could well play a leading role in the transformations of urban space, of working and consuming patterns undertaken by predatory platforms.

**Data statement.** All interviewees' names have been changed to protect their anonymity/have been published with their permission.

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**Competing interests.** There are no potential or perceived conflicts of interest.

## Notes

1 The figures vary between 1% and 6% depending on the counting method, 7% in France, but there is an obvious lack of administrative data about platform workers.

2 Council of the European Union, Proposal for a directive on improving working conditions in platform work, Brussels, 7 June 2023.

3 I voluntarily use the emic term of rider instead of courier.

4 We can refer to the criteria of the International Labour Organization (ILO), especially to the Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation No 193 (2002).

5 The conditions of reflexivity require me to specify that I was also a rider for the Take Eat Easy and Foodora platforms in Paris between 2015 and 2017, even though I had not collected any data at the time. These experiences gave me an intimate knowledge of the topic and made it easier for me to enter the field.

6 I would like to thank all the Mensakas for their warm welcome and their *compañerismo*.

7 Riders on the storm is the title of the Doors' song (1971).

8 It is a significant fact that the platforms were attempting to negotiate ahead of the legal process, offering several leaders the sum several thousand euros.

9 Tribunal Supremo, Sala de los social 805/2020, Procedimiento 4746/2019, Empresa: Glovo, 25/09/2020.

10 The 'mareas' (literally, the 'tides') are sectorial social movements that emerged after the 15M movement to occupy public squares in 2011 and which were formed around a particular socio-professional category: the 'marea blanca' for care workers, the 'marea pensionista' for pensioners campaigning for their pensions, and so on . . .

11 The Kellys are an association of chambermaids formed via social networks to claim better working conditions.

12 'Navigators of the asphalt', published by the far-right party VOX, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPZ3J924T\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPZ3J924T_U), 12 December 2022.

13 <https://observa-tas.org>.

14 Mensakas has been selected as part of the Singulars funding programme of the Catalan government (Generalitat) in 2019 and 2020, which supports cooperativism in Catalonia. The cooperative has also been selected as part of the MatchImpulsa10 programme (2021) funded by the Goteo foundation and Barcelona Activa to promote the digitalisation of the SSE.

15 'Bicibus: how Barcelona got kids cycling safely to school?', *The Guardian*, 4 October 2023. [[https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/oct/04/bicibus-how-barcelona-got-kids-cycling-safely-to-school?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/oct/04/bicibus-how-barcelona-got-kids-cycling-safely-to-school?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other)]

16 'Struggle and self-management' are one of the Mensakas' mottos.

17 Talkual (« as it is ») is a company set up in 2020 that distributes crates of vegetables directly from the producer to the customer. It recovers fruit and vegetables that supermarkets reject for aesthetic or size reasons.

18 Intercoperation is the 6th principle of cooperatives according to the Statement on the Cooperative Identity in 1995: 1. Voluntary membership, 2. Democratic member control, 3. Member economic participation, 4. Autonomy and independence, 5. Education, training, and information, 6. Cooperation among cooperatives, and 7. Concern for community.

19 Instant messaging for professional use.

20 Minimum contribution for cooperatives just starting out or struggling to get by.



- 21 Three years later, Olvo left Coopcycle, implementing its own software and changing his name into Les Cargonautes.
- 22 We can mention various funding programmes: ‘Inclusive digital mobility solution’ (HINDIMO), ‘Carbon Removal governance Outline and Periurban agriculture for Sustainable food system’ (CROPS4LIFE) and Erasmus + Youth whose aim is to support and train new generation of coops’ riders at the European level.
- 23 Benoît Boorits (2019) Coopcycle: construire la qualification du métier contre le dumping social, Association Autogestion, 7 January 2019. <https://autogestion.asso.fr/coopcycle-construire-la-qualification-du-metier-contre-le-dumping-social/>.
- 24 Regulation of the sector at European level is still under debate. cf Proposal for a directive on improving working conditions in platform work, European Commission, 9 December 2021.
- 25 Journal of Sessions of the Parliament of Catalonia, Enterprise and Labour Committee, Session 26, no 506, 19 January 2023.
- 26 This pooling of resources also enables Mensakas to take part in the Catalan government’s ACOL programme, a work and training scheme for people in the process of being legalised.
- 27 Another major challenge of platform cooperativism is to break down the barriers between sectoral struggles, as is the case in Barcelona between Riders X Derechos and the professional association Elite Taxi and Taxi Project 2.0.

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