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(doi: 10.7389/100590)

Politiche Sociali (ISSN 2284-2098)
Fascicolo 1, gennaio-aprile 2021

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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses workers' collective responses to digital platforms in passenger transportation. Sociological and geographic conceptions are used to emphasise that power configurations and actors' subjective dispositions matter in explaining different urban landscapes of platform work. A comparison of New York City (NYC) and Vienna shows that the divergence of outcomes hinges on the state and position of employment relations fields within wider fields of power, and on the dispositions of organised labour actors. In NYC, taxi drivers have successfully been able to alter the economic landscape responding in an inclusive manner to new market entrants and incorporating them into existing collective organisations. Vienna's passenger transportation landscape was largely reconfigured by legislative reforms that brought platforms and for hire-car companies under the same rules as taxis, pointing to the persistent entrenchment of workers' organisations in corporatist employment relations fields.

KEYWORDS *Economic landscapes, New York City, passenger transportation, platform work, social fields, Vienna.*

Passenger transportation platforms like Uber have frequently ignored existing rules and regulations as they pursued market growth; however, despite their disregard for existing regulatory frameworks, they do not operate in a vacuum. On the contrary, platforms enter social spaces marked by existing (and historically specific) power relations, geographic and social divisions (e.g., local and national markets, public and private forms of governance), and configurations of work and employment. Our research examines the struggles between platform operators, state and quasi-state actors, and workers and incumbent businesses, and their interest associations over what it means to perform work mediated by digital platforms. We focus on case studies in

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ISSN 2284-2098

Vienna and New York. Against this background our research addresses the following questions: How do labour actors construct their collective responses to digital platforms? How are economic and urban transportation landscapes and power relations forged through these struggles? And how do these struggles impact on the constitution of work in passenger transportation by taxi, hire car with driver and ridesharing?

We draw inspiration from sociological and geographic scholarship to construct an analytical framework that attends to three concepts: economic landscapes, power, and social fields. We invoke Pierre Bourdieu's (2005) social theory, and regard power relations as essential for shaping social relations, the configurations of work that they hold, and the practices and dispositions of collective labour actors. This array of social relations and practices come to be «fixed» in particular places and at particular times, and help to weave together the fabric of what we refer to in this paper as economic landscapes. Drawing on the work of economic geographers, we understand economic landscapes to be geographical arrangements of economic activities (Harvey 2001). Such material organisations and the representations they embody are inherently spatial and are prone to change over time. This is because landscapes, «(including representation in the bricks and mortar of the built landscape) [are] a form of power: a power to determine what is and what is not seen», as well as a power to determine the type and quality of social relations they enable (Mitchell 2008, 31). As power is contested between actors – including between workers and firms – economic landscapes also become sites of contention as actors seek to remake them so as to better reflect their distinct interests (Herod 2001).

Within taxi markets power relations and subsequently, economic landscapes – specifically those related to urban transportation networks – are in flux. Locally embedded taxi industries, for instance, have been challenged by digital platforms like Uber who attempt to establish a global network of private vehicle owners who offer ridesharing around the world while individual workers remain place-bound. Despite the company's overwhelming economic capital endowment, Uber's core business model, which relied on private vehicle owners who lack a taxi license, was eventually prohibited in many European nation states. Agents therefore have also struggled over the legitimate means (e.g., work related rules and practices) and ends (e.g., economic profits versus a living wage for drivers) of economic action.

We understand the emerging landscape of digital labour platform work to be a function of a generative process that takes into account economic agent's power positions, dispositions and position takings in different geographic and social fields. A social field is understood as a historically created, relatively autonomous social space of power positions and area of activity in which field agents have achieved a certain degree of social closure, shared assumptions about what is at stake and the related belief (illusio) that the game is worth playing (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98). In the context of contemporary transportation markets, however, workers, incumbent businesses and other field actors have become subject to reconfigured fields in which new actors, including globalised digital platforms and their financiers, have emerged. New actors exert pressure for change and seek to (re)shape transportation landscapes to facilitate their own interests; yet, owing to the contested power relations, they are not always successful in achieving this.

Drawing on two case studies (Vienna and New York City) we compare and contrast the collective responses of labour actors to the introduction of digital labour platforms and examine workers' contribution to the reproduction or change of established economic landscapes and the constitution of work. In each case study we examine the historically evolved economic landscapes and the state of passenger transportation fields (taxi, hire car with driver and ridesharing). Our interest lies in the collective responses of workers via labour groups, trade unions and business associations who also organise self-employed taxi drivers towards digital platforms. In order to understand labour representatives' perception, evaluation and behaviour we also need to examine the wider social space of positions (e.g., the low wages and social status of, often migrant, taxi and Uber drivers in relation to workers in other industries), and, in addition to economic fields, interacting state and associational fields. Because of its symbolic power and regulatory capacity, the state and its subfields (e.g., administrative authorities, labour courts) also play a decisive role in the constitution of economic landscapes. To summarise, we posit that the collective responses of workers to digital platforms and their propensity to reproduce or change economic landscapes, and the configurations of work, hinge on both the relations of force within and between economic and adjacent fields and labour representatives' acquired and adapted dispositions towards different groups of workers.

The article has four remaining sections. The next section introduces the theoretical considerations that the article draws on: economic landscapes, power, and social fields in the context of the for-hire transportation industry. This overview provides a brief context to longstanding trends in the taxi industries and presents the concept of the economic landscape as a representation of power and social fields situated in particular places and at particular times. This is followed by a presentation of our theoretical framework where, drawing on Bourdieu and previous work by Pernicka *et al.* (2021), we highlight five forces of influence that can incite change in economic landscapes – or conversely, reproduce them. This framework is then employed in our discussion of our two case studies, where we «read» the urban transport landscapes in order to understand the power and social field dynamics that have brought them into being. Our case studies are based on primary research that was conducted between 2016 and 2020 in Vienna and New York. Our broad research methods included qualitative interviews with key informants including union and worker representatives, industry and city representatives and informal conversations with drivers during taxi rides (participant observation) (for relevant interviews with workers' organisations that are particularly pertinent to this contribution, see the appendix). We have also conducted significant media and policy analysis. While our past contributions draw heavily on primary data that we have collected in the course of our research (see: Jonhston 2018; Pernicka 2019; Johnston and Pernicka 2020; Johnston 2021), this paper primarily presents the aggregate findings of our past research. It ends with a brief conclusion where we summarise our findings.

1. Theoretical considerations: Economic landscapes, power and social fields

The geographical notion of economic landscape, as an organising principle of socio-economic activity, strongly resonates with Bourdieu's (1996) assertation: physical space, like social space, has to be understood as a relational order of objective power positions and subjective patterns of perception, thought and action. Bourdieu's conceptions of power and social fields have therefore also made inroads in cultural and economic geography. The literature on economic landscapes that draws from the sociology of Bourdieu includes a wide variety of projects that, for example, explore the link between self and place and thus between landscape and culture (Burton 2012), emphasise the role of social capital in reproducing or transforming material socio-spatial inequalities (Holt 2008), or reconstruct the relationship between local and non-local fields in influencing entrepreneurial ecosystems, demonstrating the multi-scalar geography of fields (Spigl 2013). Yet, even though economic geographers have sought «to uncover how landscape (both physical and representational) was central to maintaining and reproducing class relations and elite power» (Mitchell 2018, 31), the most prominent and frequently cited economic and labor geographers have not explicitly engaged with Bourdieu's work and vice versa.

Within the discipline of Sociology, by contrast, Bourdieusian conceptions of social fields have more recently been employed to overcome methodological nationalism (Beck and Grande 2004). This strand of literature emphasises that the social and geographical boundaries of fields are fluid and structured by power (Levitt and Schiller 2004; Pernicka and Lahusen 2018; Sapiro 2018). Sapiro, for instance, notes that «(t)he boundaries of fields are related to the process of differentiation and specialization of activities, as well as to geographic borders, but these boundaries are not given, they evolve over time and are constantly reconsidered and challenged» (Sapiro 2018, 2).

Both strands of literature, economic geography and sociological field theory, however, can be thought together to improve our understanding of the (reconfiguring) economic landscapes of taxi markets, their relations of power and meaning. Together, they demonstrate the interdependent features of physical and social spaces. In revealing the relational construction of economic landscapes, power and social fields, we also hope to contribute to a better understanding of the possibilities and constraints for collective labor actors while responding to the emergence of globally operating digital platform corporations.

Within most urban centres, taxi markets operate in a particular economic field that interacts with other fields. In most cities, taxis operate in the private sector, yet because they are part of a transportation infrastructure their labour helps to achieve resident mobility as a public good; regulations have thus been devised to achieve this aim (Dotterud Leiren and Aarhaug 2016). Yet the cost barrier to accessing for-hire private passenger transport services has often exceeded that of the working class. In New York, for example, rides have historically been centred in Midtown and Lower Manhattan (Schneider n.d.) – areas associated with high finance, expensive real estate, and Wall Street. These areas have historically high levels of wealth relative to the city's outer boroughs where residents have long experienced a dearth of publicly funded transport options. Taxi drivers, meanwhile, have tended to be members of the working class, if not the working poor. The majority are immigrants, as well as people of colour. By contrast, in large European cities, like Berlin or Vienna, with their well-developed public transportation systems, taxis have used to offer last mile services, i.e., moving people from a public transportation hub to a final destination. Vienna's taxi market exhibits poor conditions in terms of pay and working conditions of drivers. In the early 1980s, federal parliament passed a constitutional law that introduced a needs-assessment clause restricting taxi concessions. In 1989, however, the constitutional court repealed the legislation and since then, licensed taxis and hire-cars do not have quantitative restrictions. In Vienna, like other European cities such as Berlin, this has resulted in a flooded and, at times, predatory market. At least for employees in the taxi and hire-car with driver sector, Vienna's drivers benefit from a collective agreement that sets very low minimum standards in terms of wages and working conditions.

While the taxi markets in Vienna and New York City have divergent histories, there has been a common trajectory of taxi markets in most capitalist economies since the 1970s or early 1980s characterised by declining wages, a shift of economic and symbolic power away from and to the detriment of the individual driver, and a relatively low priority of the taxi industry and its workers in established union movements (Dubal 2017; Hodges 2007; Mathew 2008; Berg and Johnston 2019). Such trends mirror the economic disempowerment that workers have more generally experienced since the 1970s. Economic geographers, for example, have argued that over the past 50 years urban and economic «policy is being reoriented away from redistribution and toward competition» (Purcell 2002, 100). Such scholars have expounded upon the myriad ways that economic landscapes have been remade to facilitate firm competition and corporate profits (see, for example Harvey 2005, 2001; Massey 1995).

This reorientation is rooted in the same neoliberal ethos that scholars such as Van Doorn, Srnicek and others, identify as the genesis of digital labour platforms generally (van Doorn 2017; Srnicek 2017). Indeed, the foundational ideology of the gig economy can be traced back to the neoliberal turn of the late 1970s and the systematic shift of risk from employers to employees (*ibid.*). This neoliberal ethos was further entrenched during the economic recession, which had a notable impact on labour markets and has been cited as a key precursor to the gig economy. Van Doorn (2017), for example, writes that a «common critical reading suggests that the recent Great Recession (2007-2011) provided the conditions of possibility for the on-demand business model that has been most frequently associated with Uber: under the combined pressures of mass un- and underemployment, fiscal austerity policies, and rising inequality, an increasingly precarious and shrinking middle-class workforce has welcomed new ways to market its assets – even if the only asset available is embodied as labor power». In such cases, rather than orienting economic policy towards social welfare and redistributing resources to un- and underemployed workers, platforms were frequently positioned as a solution and an avenue through which workers could compete their way out of economic desperation.

In contemporary cities, however, and despite drivers similar (low) economic position, workers' collective responses towards digital platforms have differed widely, owing, in large part to their available power resources and the capacity to harness these resources to (re)shape economic landscapes. Besides their objective power position in passenger transportation fields and the wider economy and society, workers' responses also hinge on their perceived limitations and possibilities of collective action. The following subsection therefore presents our own approach, a Bourdieusian inspired, field-theoretical take on economic landscapes and workers' collective action with which we attempt to reconcile objectivism (i.e., power-based explanations) and subjectivism (i.e., explanations derived from subjective perceptions and dispositions) by stressing the generative and contested character of economic landscapes, power, and social fields.

2. Forces of reproduction and change of economic landscapes

By examining the contemporary economic landscapes of transportation markets and unpacking their symbolic and material assemblages, we can better understand the power dynamics that brought transport landscapes into being and the political and economic interests and power positions that they reflect. This is because while landscapes are «physical-spatially manifested consequences and side effects of social, power-mediated action» (Kühne 2019, 74), they are also embedded within the social and power relations that make them. Inspired by the approach of Don Mitchell (2008), we set out to «read» the urban transportation landscapes of Vienna and New York City with an eye to how they are being (re)shaped by labour platforms to understand whose interests they reflect and what is at stake in their creation.

In drawing on Bourdieu's social theory, we begin from an understanding that modern differentiated societies are comprised of historically evolved, interdependent and hierarchically structured, but relatively autonomous social fields (see Figure 1). Individual drivers partake first and foremost in the fields of passenger transportation that have been established at local level (especially, urban spaces); these workers have developed a practical sense and a particular habitus (dispositions, interests, and spatial representations) while driving. Moreover, divisions in the labour market and workers' dominant or dominated position as taxi owner-drivers, self-employed, or employees influence (but do not determinate) workers' views of economic landscapes and how they perceive the means and ends of collective action. Our research interest in the collective responses of workers toward platforms also requires us to take account of the genesis and current state of interacting fields, most importantly associational fields and their subfields of labour unions and workers' groups. While union membership of self-employed workers was a contested issue in the two cases under scrutiny, the New York Taxi Worker's Alliance proved to be the more active labour organisation, attempting to organise both taxi and Uber drivers. In Vienna, by contrast, taxi drivers occupy comparatively low positions in terms of the unions' attention and strategic priority (see case studies below).

From a social-field theoretical perspective we focus on those forms of power (or capital, a term, Bourdieu uses interchangeably) that we identify as particularly effective in the respective fields and for workers' and businesses' ability to shape economic landscapes in their own image. According to Bourdieu's relational perspective, his conception of power relates to the objective positions that individuals occupy within the distribution of resources in social space; the most fundamental powers being economic, cultural, social and symbolic power. These, and a variety of other field-specific forms of power can be examined via their materialised (e.g. economic capital), embodied

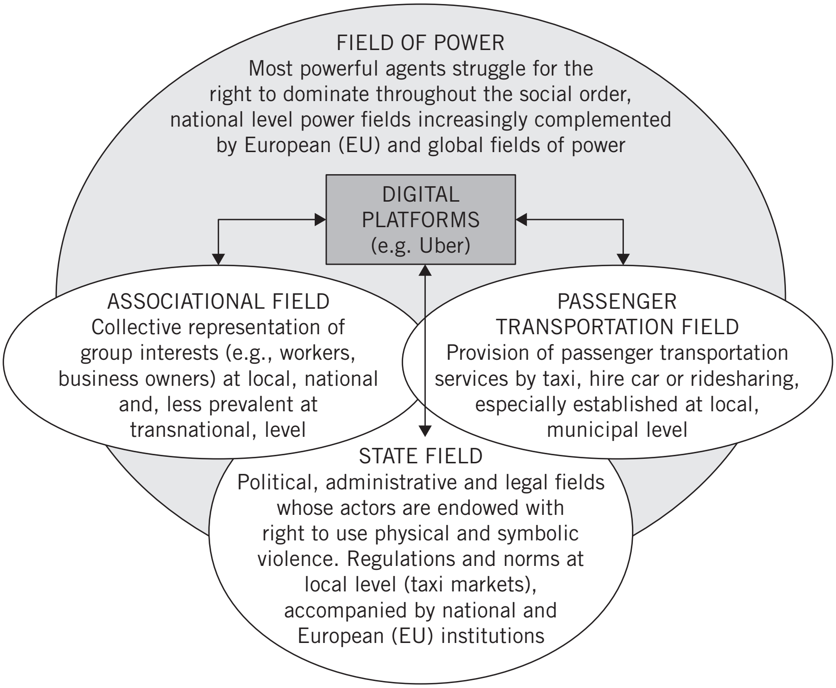

Fig.1. Interacting fields influencing economic landscapes.

Source: own depiction.

(e.g., cultural capital) and social forms (i.e. the array of agent's interpersonal and cooperative relationships based on shared understandings, norms and values, identities and solidarities that contribute to the effective functioning of groups) (Bourdieu 1986). Institutional power, meanwhile, is considered to be a secondary form of social power in which past struggles temporarily crystallise, such as the legal framework for collective bargaining, or the institutionalised configurations of management and labour control in taxi and ridesharing markets.

Finally, our approach stresses the active role that symbolic power plays as a resource that reflects, constitutes, maintains, and changes social hierarchies (Bourdieu 1989, 20) that are spatially and temporarily fixed on and across landscapes. Symbolic power is rooted in the perception or recognition of other forms of power within a certain social field as legitimate and «natural». A telling example relates to the symbolic struggle over the classification of platforms as either technology networks or taxi companies. Unions and state agents have challenged new actors' claims that they are technology providers– contending instead that transportation platforms are taxi companies who are denying drivers' wages and benefits by misclassifying them as independent contractors instead of employees. Given that independent contractors are rarely covered by labour law and lack collective bargaining rights, the outcome of these struggles is decisive in shaping the legitimacy and effectiveness of workers' institutional and associational power resources and how economic landscapes are made. In this case, symbolic struggles (re)structure the social space within which economic, political and associational actors operate. Such symbolic struggles work in concert with processes that institutionalise rules, norms and practices in different social fields and on various spatial scales, and the outcomes of these struggles shape transportation markets, impacting present and future repertoires of contention (Johnston and Pernicka 2020).

Field theory assumes that society and social inequality are largely produced and reproduced through practices, or shared routines, behaviours or customary rules (Bourdieu 1977, 16). Social fields shape these practices informing the orientations of agents' actions and how they relate to the familiar and adapt to new situations. In other words, they contribute to the genesis of what Bourdieu calls a field-specific «habitus», or system of durable dispositions or a «structured structure». However, habitus also functions as «structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them» (Bourdieu 1990, 53). Habitus constrains but does not determine thought and action. We assume that agents' reflection on and awareness of their habitus varies with (shifting) power relations and the state of economic fields, as it happens in passenger transportation markets.

In drawing on earlier attempts to apply Bourdieusian field theory to the reconfiguration of economy and society (see also Boyer 2014 and Pernicka *et al.* 2021), we argue that an economic landscape and its field-specific underpinnings is more likely to change rather than to be reproduced if (1) the economic field's autonomy decreases, (2) its boundaries to other fields (e.g., global financial field) become blurred, (3) social closure in relation to new actors (e.g., Uber) weakens, (4) the dominant actors' power position is challenged, and (5) habitus and field structures desynchronise (see Figure 2).

The first force that can incite change or reproduction in economic landscapes relates to (1) the interactions between passenger transportation fields and the fields of power on different spatial scales. A field of power is understood as an arena of material and symbolic struggle among different fields (e.g., economic field, state fields, etc.) and their most powerful actors, respectively, for the right to dominate throughout the social order (Swartz 2013). The relative autonomy of the passenger transportation field vis-à-vis fields of power is therefore decisive in determining the field's (speed of) transformation or reproduction.

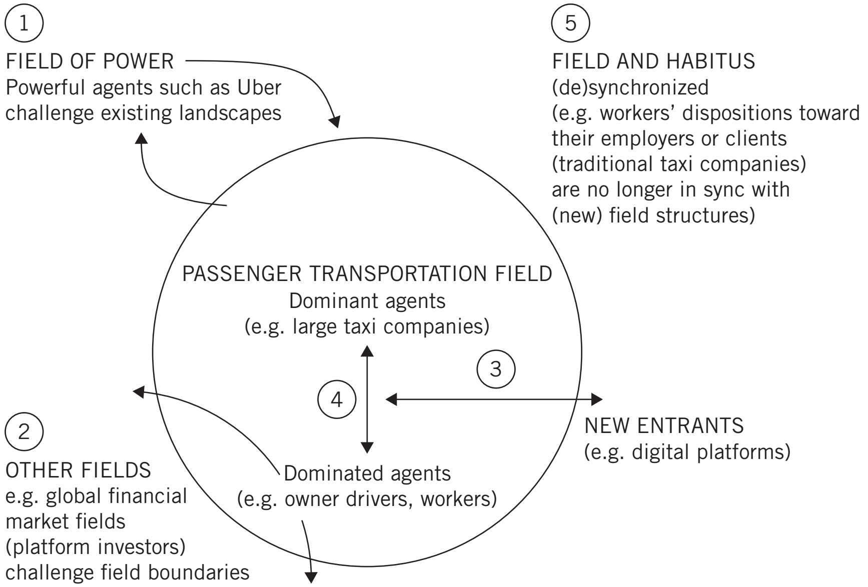

Fig. 2. Forces of the reproduction and change of economic landscapes and configurations of work.

Source: own depiction, inspired by Boyer (2014, 367).

A second force (2) relates to the (re)definition of frontiers between social fields under the effect of internal struggles (Bourdieu 2000). The move towards a redefinition of passenger transportation fields is especially related to the growing influence of transnationalised economic fields (especially financial markets or the automobile industry) that have put pressure on local taxi markets. However, these fields do *not directly* impact on the perceptions, thought, and behaviour of economic field agents, but are translated according to the field's own logics and practices.

The third force (3) relates to the entry of new agents who – if powerful enough – are likely to change field-specific rules and practices, whereas less powerful intruders are more likely to adapt themselves to the field's doxa (taken-for-granted rules, norms and values).

The fourth force (4) directs our attention within the social field to the ability of dominant field actors who predate new market entrants – such as large taxi operators or conventional taxi dispatch centers – to maintain existing field structures or, in the event of field change, to influence «the speed of [such] transformation» (Bourdieu 2000, cited in Boyer 2008, 364).

The final force of reproduction or change (5) refers to the synchronization or desynchronization of the field and the field-specific habitus, respectively. In relatively stable field structures where habitus and field are highly synchronised, landscapes are apt to remain relatively stable. However, when field actors' acquired dispositions and practices are no longer in sync with the (reconfigured) fields' structures and practices (i.e., habitus desynchronization), they are more likely to become aware of their habitus and try to defend existing practices or invent new ones, thus increasing the opportunity for changes in the economic landscape. For instance, workers' organisations in the US and Europe have begun to experiment with new forms of organising and mobilizing independent contractors because self-employed workers have rarely benefitted from established unionism practices devised for employees. Every effort directed at organising collective action with the aim to maintain or change the field's basic features, however, must reckon with what Bourdieu (1990, 59) called the hysteresis effect of the habitus. This concept refers to the «structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them which is the cause of missed opportunities» (*ibid.*). With reference to the above example, this means that although some workers' organisations (e.g., NYTWA) may seek to create new opportunities for organising and mobilization, they may not always be able to achieve these goals not least because within the wider labour movement many actors have not yet reoriented their dispositions towards new labour market structures and forms of self-employed work.

3. Case studies

In our case studies we examine workers' collective responses to digital platforms and ask if and how their struggles for decent wages and working conditions impact the configurations of work in passenger transportation fields and in turn, economic landscapes. Our analysis of taxi markets in New York and Vienna is structured along the five forces of reproduction and change presented in our conceptual framework (see Figure 2). We begin by depicting the current state of passenger transportation fields, the spatial «fix» of economic landscapes and their configurations of work in both of the selected cities. Scrutinizing the economic field's autonomy vis-a-vis the field of power and its boundaries in relation to other fields, the responses of field actors to emerging digital platforms, field-internal power dynamics and agent's habitus over time allows us to trace the forces of reproduction or change of passenger transportation fields. As our focus lies on collective labour actors' contributions to these trajectories, we also examine interacting associational fields and trade union subfields to assess their role in shaping workers' and union representative's perceptions and assessments of power relations and digital platforms.

4. Vienna

In Austria digital platforms, especially Uber and Bolt (renamed from Taxify, an Estonian company), started their operations in Vienna in 2014; in 2019 these companies faced a critical juncture vis-a-vis urban passenger transportation fields. This occurred when federal legislators brought all passenger transportation market players (taxis, for hire car companies and ridesharing platforms) under a common regulatory framework (Austrian Parliament 2019a). Instead of liberalising passenger transportation markets, the legislation's overhaul adapted by extending and re-enforcing established rules and practices for taxis to apply them to for hire-cars with drivers. Rules and practices were also extended to digital platforms who, due to the prohibition of commercial ridesharing by private vehicle owners, used to cooperate with hire-cars with driver firms. Austria's provinces (Bundesländer) are (still) in charge of regulating fares; however, so far (December 2020) Vienna's provincial governor has not yet issued a respective ordinance mandating standard fares. All employed drivers fall under the purview of a national collective agreement; however, wages and working conditions are among the poorest of all sector level collective agreements (Austria has an almost 100% coverage rate of collectively agreed minimum wages), and many drivers work as self-employed or owner drivers.

Field autonomy vis-a-vis the field of power

The degree of relative autonomy of the passenger transportation field vis-a-vis powerful agents including, among others, state actors at various scales or large financial investors who operate globally is decisive in determining the field's (speed of) transformation or reproduction. Even though the Austrian taxi business belongs to the private sector of the economy, it is considered as part of local public transportation systems and contributes to the provision of public services. The taxi field is therefore closely linked to, and shaped by, the political-administrative field. In addition, passenger transportation fields and associational fields are tightly interdependent and trade union responses towards Uber are also shaped by the relative autonomy (or dependency) of the associational field, and its subfield of employment relations. Austria boasts highly centralised and coordinated business and labour organisations and stable collective bargaining practices. The compulsory membership of business companies in the Chamber of Commerce (WKO), in particular, contributes to the country's exceptional high level of collective bargaining coverage. Because Uber operates from its European headquarters in the Netherlands, the company has not yet applied for a business license in the taxi sector in Austria but offered its UberX services in cooperation with for hire-car companies. Uber is therefore not a member of the WKO's transportation sector (Pernicka 2019).

In recent years, the social partners' involvement in public policy making, especially in social and labour market policies, has been less supported by federal governments than, for example, collective bargaining. There used to be a very close relationship between the social partner organisations and federal governments, specifically the Social Democratic Party (SPO) and the People's Party (OVP). In late 2017, however, a new coalition government of the ÖVP and the right-wing Freedom Party (FPÖ) came to power and largely excluded social partners and in particular labour associations from public policy making. Yet these developments did not bring the associational subfield in passenger transportation markets to a halt. Unions and the Chamber of Labour still have close ties to the Social Democratic Party, SPÖ, then the second strongest party in parliament, which lends political power to the labour organisations and vice versa.

Boundaries to other fields

In an attempt to achieve network effects, Uber entered Vienna's taxi field via the less strictly regulated for hire-car with driver sector (Mietwagen) and thus, contributed to the blurring of the boundaries between taxis and hire-car with driver fields. Because there is no quantitative restriction for taxis in Austria's capital city, the 2014 entrance of Uber increased the number of hire-car with driver licences (+146%). Within five years, this growth had clearly outpaced that of taxi licenses (+4%) (WKO 2019), suggesting that Uber's strategy might have overwhelmed the existing system and drastically changed the transportation landscape and the power resources that underpinned it. The shifting boundaries between distinct economic fields and their field specific logics and practices, however, is not merely a question of economic power but of political and institutional power configurations contributing to the reinforcement or change of a field's established boundaries.

New entrants

Despite earlier taxi applications that linked traditional taxis and customers (i.e., MyTaxi), digital platforms entered the Austrian passenger transportation fields later than elsewhere in Europe and North America. Some of Uber's services – such as UberPop, its cheapest option which operates with private vehicles – never existed in Austria despite having made early inroads in other European countries. Instead, Uber cooperates with for hire-car companies that had less strict regulations than taxis regarding their operational obligations, qualification requirements of drivers, and fare systems. In particular, for hire-cars had to return to the place of business after each journey, a requirement Uber violated repeatedly. Court rulings against Uber did not prevent the platform and its partners, hire-car firms, from continuing business. The social partners' strategy to fight Uber in the public policy making field proved more effective. Collective labour actors (including the Social Democratic Party in parliament) and incumbent business associations, especially the Chamber of Commerce, played a major role in reinforcing the field's boundaries, indicating a strong role of social partnership fields within which organised capital and labour still exhibit a strong commitment towards practices of coordination.

Field internal power dynamics

In February 2019 a former trade union official and social democratic MP initiated legislation to bring all market players under a common regulatory framework. In June 2019, all major parties in parliament, ÖVP, SPÖ and FPÖ eventually agreed on legislation that established common trade regulations for taxis and for-hire car companies. The legislation induced for hire car companies, including Uber's driver partners, to follow the stricter rules obeyed by taxi companies, like the obligation for drivers to pass a language and a knowledge test about the city, and to set fares as determined by the municipal governments. In 2020, the federal Minister of Transportation issued an additional legislative proposal to bring the passenger transportation law in line with the new trade regulations. However, the legislative proposal embraces a new fare system that might lead to a bifurcation of the taxi field as it stipulates fixed fares for taxis offering their services via street hail or at a taxi stand, whereas conventional and digital dispatching services can freely set prices above a certain minimum fare. This legislative proposal is still under discussion and has not yet been passed by parliament. Policy actors have sought to create a level playing field in the passenger transportation sector; however, given the most recent regulatory proposal it is unclear if this aim will be accomplished. Moreover, digital platforms that do not have a business location in Austria still benefit financially; they are exempt from local revenue taxes which exacerbates the unequal treatment of local companies compared with those that operate transnationally.

Habitus (de)synchronisation

Because state actors have largely maintained their allegiance to the established goals of the taxi sector (public service provision in passenger transportation);

and because labour actors leveraged their cooperative relationship (social capital) with business associations and political actors, outcomes suggest that the taxi field's relative autonomy could be reinforced. At the same time and due to the absence of quantitative restrictions, the influx of large numbers of hire-car companies (now renamed as taxi companies) and their drivers into the field have further deteriorated the economic position of incumbent taxi businesses and drivers. So far, this structural shift has not contributed to the de-synchronisation of the field and collective actors' habitus. Business associations' representatives' dispositions seem to remain unchanged towards established practices in the fields of passenger transportation and employment relations. Trade unions, meanwhile, have become more attentive to digital platform workers in the passenger transportation sector and other gig-work services fields such as food delivery or logistics, and are attempting to organise them as members. Whereas labour actors were able to leverage social and institutional power in the taxi transport field, where close proximities to public-administrative and political fields exist, economic power imbalances in other fields can only be resolved by organising workers to act collectively (associational power), a practice that has not yet been firmly established in the Austrian trade union landscape.

5. New York

New York City's (NYC) transportation landscapes have undergone vast transformations over the past decade. The catalyst of these changes was the entrance of app-based dispatching services, like Uber and Lyft, which entered the market in 2011. Since this time, there have been struggles over working conditions and wages led by workers that will be discussed in this case study; these include the struggle to implement a vehicle cap limiting the number of for-hire transportation vehicles and the creation of a minimum fare for app-based drivers, which occurred in 2018, and the ongoing struggle for debt relief. The first struggle exemplifies how taxi drivers have successfully been able to alter the economic landscape by responding in an inclusive manner to new market entrants and incorporating them into existing collective organisations. The second, more recent example, the struggle for drivers' debt relief, shows how state field actors, in this case actors engaged in the public policy responses to the global health crisis regarding the Covid pandemic, have come to view drivers' plight as one of many in the urban economic landscape. This has occurred even though drivers' financial distress predates the Covid outbreak (although it has been exacerbated by it). While this particular issue remains highly contested and is characterised by ongoing expressions of direct action, there has not yet been a resolution.

Field autonomy vis-a-vis the field of power

For-hire transportation markets, which encompass NYC's traditional and iconic yellow cab sector as well as limousines and black cars, the subsector through which applications like Uber and Lyft operate, are overseen by the city's centralised «Taxi and Limousine Commission» (TLC). The commission is responsible for all aspects of market regulation including licensing, vehicle registration, and developing and enforcing operating procedures and protocols. In addition to the TLC, there are a number of other actors who have helped to shape the transportation field; over the past twenty years these include, among others, workers' collective organisations – notably the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA) and the more recently formed Independent Drivers Guild (IDG). Workers can electively choose to join these organisations; however, as independent contractors, these groups are not traditional unions in that they do not engage in collective bargaining.

This independent contractor status has significant implications for the employment relations field. Workers are left without many protections that would be standard in traditional employment relationships such as occupational health and safety protections, minimum wage protections, and the right to join a union. Nonetheless, compared to the rest of the United States, NYC continues to have relatively high rates of unionism in other sectors and has passed pro-worker legislation such as higher minimum wage rates, paid time off, and protections for freelance workers. These features suggest that power-wielding actors in the urban landscapes maintain a disposition that is relatively favourable when it comes to workers' rights, and that such rights can be, and have been, institutionalised. In addition to workers' groups, other prominent actors in the transportation field include the Metropolitan Taxi Board of Trade (MTBOT), an association comprised of medallion owners, often affiliated with garages and fleets of yellow cabs; and since 2011, app-based companies like Uber and Lyft.

Boundaries to other fields

Historically, yellow cabs were NYC's most lucrative subsector and operated in parts of the city characterised by a high demand for transport services and a wealthy clientele. These features that were afforded by a series of institutional rules that had developed to prop up and support the yellow cab subsector specifically, and these vehicles were viewed as an important part of the city's transportation infrastructure (Mathew 2008; Hodges 2007). Though technically private vehicles and a private industry, taxicabs are seen to provide a public good and have thus been regulated by the TLC, giving rise to a distinct transportation field.

Yellow cabs have been obliged to follow strict regulations in the name of public interest. For example, they are unable to refuse or discriminate against passengers based on final destination, or protected categories like race or disability status. The TLC has also endowed yellow cab drivers with select benefits. Historically these included exclusive street-hailing rights in Midtown and Lower Manhattan and standardised fare rates that exceeded what drivers would typically earn in other sub-sectors. As a result, taxi medallions, the permits required to operate a vehicle in the city, were capped in number and grew in value (*ibid.*). Prior to Uber, black cars, meanwhile, typically operated either in the city's outer boroughs or were hired as private cars by individuals in highly compensated industries like finance, investment, and real estate. Viewed as either a high-class service or as otherwise peripheral to the urban transport landscape, black cars were less regulated vis-à-vis their operating rules and licensing requirements. For example, whereas yellow cab drivers needed to pass a knowledge test of the city and have a basic comprehension of English; there were no such requirements for black car drivers. With the introduction of new market entrant firms like Uber, however, such traditional patterns and distinctions between the subsector were disrupted.

New entrants

When Uber first entered NYC, it did so while disregarding existing TLC rules and regulations. Among other things, app-based companies argued that e-hailing was categorically different from traditional street hails, and the transit they facilitated was «pre-arranged» – even if mere minutes before rides begun. What is more, app-based transit firms entered through the lesser-regulated black car sub-sector. This sub-sector had no limits on the number of cars that could be registered. This fact, in concert with companies' aggressive on-boarding policies, led to drastic increases in the number of registered drivers. Between 2014 and 2018 alone the number of black cars increased from roughly 10,000 to nearly 110,000, with a visible impact on the economic landscape and many of these drivers elected to affiliate themselves with app-based transit providers (DeBlasio and Joshi 2016). Ultimately this has had an adverse impact on existing drivers in both traditional and app-based sectors as the supply of drivers has, according to drivers' experiences, outpaced demand thus increasing competition within the sector and making it more difficult to earn a living (Dubal 2019; Johnston 2021).

Field internal power dynamics

Generally, workers' collective organisations have variable responses when existing employment fields are threatened. In some cases, groups like unions respond by defending existing fields and limiting the scope of participation of new entrants in an effort to maintain stability in the field and defend existing economic landscapes (Benassi and Dorigatti 2015). Elsewhere, as in the case of NYC, workers' organisations have taken an inclusive approach to organising, with the belief that only by defending and improving the conditions of the most precarious workers can a «race to the bottom» be avoided. NYTWA, an organisation which boasts a long history of organising within the traditional yellow cab subsector adopted the latter approach and welcomed drivers affiliated with Uber and other app companies into their organising efforts.

There are multiple reasons for NYTWA's orientation towards inclusive organising. For one, with a membership comprised of independent contractors, NYTWA has occupied a liminal space in the labour movement. Although non-standard employment is on the rise (ILO 2016), NYTWA was the first affiliate of the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations whose membership was comprised of non-standard, self-employed workers. As part of the former Excluded Worker Congress (Goldberg and Jackson 2011), a collection of workers' organisations in industries that have long been exempt from key labour laws and their respective rights and protections, NYTWA has adopted an ethos of inclusion within its own membership as it has fought for a place at the table in the broader labour movement. This was extended to app-based drivers. Second, NYTWA adopts a class and occupation oriented, rather than firm-oriented organising model. Drivers, and particularly lease drivers who rented cabs from garages or brokers, had a long history of disaffection with the terms and conditions of their employment – particularly related to fare rates and labour's share. Dissatisfaction was rarely garage specific and more often viewed as a symptom of a power imbalance within the industry more generally. Thus, rather than focussing past campaigns on specific garages, NYTWA has more often structured its campaigns around improving industry rules and regulations writ large.

Habitus (de)synchronisation

It might be said, in fact, that desynchronization between traditional taxi drivers' dispositions and field structures was already in place when digital platforms in the passenger transportation field emerged. With the entrance of Uber, such desynchronization only grew. When discontented traditional cab drivers joined forces with afflicted app-based drivers who were also experiencing negative consequences of a flooded labour market, NYTWA was able to increase their associational power and effectively secure institutional gains. This altered the power dynamics within the field and ultimately restructure the economic landscape through the introduction of a vehicle cap on any new cars.

While the vehicle cap helped to halt further deterioration of industry conditions and the minimum fare provision increased base wages for ap-p-based drivers significantly, years of absent regulation left many traditional taxi cab drivers – particularly a class termed «owner-operators», those who owned their medallions and drove as an occupation – in a sea of desperation. The oversupply of vehicles on the streets had transformed their medallions into toxic assets. Unlike the market entrance of Uber, the rapid devaluation of medallions negatively impacted a smaller number of drivers. So, while demonstrations of associational power by NYTWA remain highly visible, fewer debt-laden drivers have turned out to protest.

Crucially and devastatingly, just as the campaign for debt relief began to gain traction with city regulators, the Covid-19 pandemic hit. In result, the transportation field has become one of many in disruption. City regulators have struggled to respond with the immediacy that drivers desperately need even as their conditions continue to deteriorate. Though the transport field maintains some elements of autonomy, it is increasingly influenced by health fields, leaving drivers to adapt to rapidly evolving conditions. While there is not yet a resolution in sight, NYTWA continues to mobilise in pursuit of debt relief.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we set out to explain the constitution of platform work in passenger transportation fields and examine organised workers' contributions to the reconfiguration of economic landscapes and power relations. While platforms seek to create an unregulated space with ease of market entry, incumbent businesses, state actors and interest associations attempt to leverage established rules, norms and practices in order to devise an economic landscape with greater governance. In drawing on sociological and geographic scholarship, we suggest an analytical framework that takes account of historically evolved economic landscapes, power relations and social fields which are conceived of as temporarily and spatially fixed. In passenger transportation fields, the urban space of material and symbolic power relations gives rise to but do not determine habitualised perceptions, dispositions, and behaviour of incumbent actors towards the reproduction or change of work-related practices. Digital platform actors, meanwhile, have tried to overcome any obstacles to their market related (even though, not necessarily profit oriented) strategies by staging themselves as technology providers rather than business firms or employers who have to abide by existing tax laws, labour and social security regulations.

We assume that economic landscapes and the social configuration of work and power they hold are more likely to change (e.g., new practices and spatial scales are being established) rather than to reproduce if (1) the field's autonomy vis-a-vis powerful actors decreases, (2) its boundaries to other fields become blurred, (3) social closure in relation to new actors (e.g., Uber) weakens, (4) the dominant actors' power position is challenged, and (5) habitus and field structures desynchronise. By comparing New York City's and Vienna's urban passenger transportation markets, a major similarity comes to the fore: taxi drivers occupy low and often precarious positions, mirroring the weak power position of taxi market actors in the broader economy. As platforms earn funds as a percentage of total rides given, platforms may be less concerned about the income potential of individual drivers or be less inclined to restrict driver supply. For workers, though, the increase of for-hire vehicles on the streets has intensified competition and, absent effective market regulation, has negatively affected wages and working conditions. In both urban spaces, workers can draw on partial support of administrative and public policy actors; however, Austrian and New York collective organisations have responded differently to the forces that have incited changes in economic and transport landscapes. While these case studies diverge in a few key ways, such differences are most acute regarding the historical trajectory, the role of the state, and the position of employment relations fields within wider fields of power. These in turn correspond to diverging levels of synchronization or desynchronization between collective labour representatives' dispositions and existing field structures.

In NYC, workers groups, especially the NYTWA, boast historic successes in realising favourable outcomes in the taxi business. This history of struggle and demonstrations of associational power, is rooted in a longstanding dissatisfaction of existing field structures. Meanwhile Austria's labour movement still relies on social partnership as institutionalised structures and practices in corporatist fields have largely been in sync with the dispositions of union actors. As a result, in Vienna, existing economic landscapes and corresponding regulations in passenger transportation fields have been largely reinforced and extended to digital platforms. However, it is still unclear if the newly proposed legislation will bring the number of vehicles down to a level where taxi drivers can still earn their living. In NYC, meanwhile, workers were able to employ their organising and mobilizing experience to successfully secure structural changes following an explosion in the number of for-hire vehicles and the blurring of boundaries between traditional taxi fields and the less strictly regulated black car fields. In this case, workers were dissatisfied with existing field structures both before and after the entrance of app-based dispatching services, but the blurring of field boundaries created opportunities for a larger number of workers to cultivate associational power and eventually, to secure institutional gains. In both cases, workers have sought to influence and (re)create economic landscapes to better reflect their own interests – for example, by standardizing market rules for all actors within the field or by limiting the entrance of new players. As we saw, workers in Vienna and New York have adopted different strategies in their quest to influence the (re) making of urban transport landscapes.

Platforms are global firms and profits are not restricted to a particular city, and yet the way that they come to operate in particular jurisdictions can be, as we see from these different case studies, unique. Urban transportation landscapes are characterised by diverse players and complex power relationships. In this paper we have sought to «read» two different transport landscapes with the aim to understand how these landscapes and power relations are forged; how labour actors construct their collective responses and how these struggles impact on the constitution of platform work in passenger transportation. To guide us through this exercise we used a field-theoretical framework outlining the social forces that reproduce or change economic landscapes, power relations and the configurations of work. Our different findings in each of these cases points to the broad potential for application of this device as an explanatory mechanism to better understand economic landscapes and working conditions in transition, across space and time.

7. Appendix

Number	Function	Date of Interview
Vienna		
1	Vienna Chamber of Commerce, executive director of the transport section	2018/03
2	Federal Chamber of Commerce, executive director of the transport section transport section	2017/08
3	Trade Union Vida, transport section, section secretary	2018/01
4	Trade Union Vida, general secretary	2020/08
5	Trade Union of Private Sector Employees, Graphical Workers and Journalists, interest representation, section secretary	2018/01
6	Trade Union of Private Sector Employees, Graphical Workers and Journalists, EU and international affairs section, inland transport, section secretary	2020/08
7	Member of Parliament and former chair of the transport committee	2020/08
8	International Transport Workers Federation, section secretary	2018/02
New York City		
1	New York Taxi Workers Alliance, president	2017/12; 2018/07
2	New York Taxi Workers Alliance, staff counsel	2017/12; 2018/07
3	New York Taxi Workers Alliance, co-founder and senior staff	2017/12
4	New York Taxi Workers Alliance, organiser 1	2017/12
5	New York Taxi Workers Alliance, organiser 2	2016/05; 2017/12
6	National Taxi Workers Alliance, vice president	2015/09

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