DigiWIP - Digital Workplace for Innovation and Participation

Final Report

Investigators: Darja Reuschke and Markieta Domecka (Geography and Environment), Pelin Demirel (Southampton Business School), Paul Walland (IT Innovation Centre), Brian Pickering (IT Innovation Centre)

1. Objectives and key insights gained

DigiWIP sought to add to existing knowledge of online work platforms through investigating underresearched links with innovation and collaboration. The key objective was to reveal new ways of working and collaborating between enterprises and individuals, to encourage innovation and participation building towards new 'Factories of the Future'. This is a vision that features in the Horizon 2020 research agenda, which the project therefore addressed.

Three different types of platforms emerged in this study: hierarchical/global, cooperative and social/local ones. We found co-creation and collaboration in cooperative and socially motivated platforms. Hierarchical/global platforms tend to encourage a culture of competition rather than collaboration, creating new lines of rivalry among freelancers competing for projects/tasks globally and among digital intermediaries competing for market share. Collaboration and innovation could be increased on these platforms through mentoring and training. However, freelancers' work – how it is experienced and paid – varies across platform types and there are significant differences within global/hierarchical platforms too.

2. Milestones and achievements

The main achievement of the project is the submission of **DigiWIP 2.0: Digital Working for Innovation and Participation**, a research proposal to Horizon 2020 ICT-11-2017 in April 2017. Project partners include: Athens Technology Center SA (coordinator), Software AG (Germany), European Forum of Independent Professionals (EFIP, Brussels), Stowarzyszenie Samozatrudnieni (Polish Association of Self-Employed) and our project team led by the IT Innovation Centre. Existing networks and new contacts to self-employment organisations gained through the DigiWIP project were successfully exploited for building this international consortium. The proposal was informed by a comprehensive literature review, two focus groups conducted with freelancers and with academic and business experts and additional searchers for partners and interviews with industry stakeholders.

Summary of milestones/deliverables

Milestones	Description	Status
Literature review	Interdisciplinary covering sociology, management, geography, IT and communication studies; key themes and issue were identified that informed the Focus Groups: innovation and co-creation in digital labour markets, crowdsourcing, online/off-line networks, reputation, inclusion, inequality reproduction, regulation, platform cooperativism	Delivered
Freelancers focus group discussion	Six participants with experiences of working on a range of digital freelance platforms: Upwork, Freelancer and PeoplePerHour, covering different high skill professions: IT, photographers, an architect, an illustrator and a financial advisor; key themes: hierarchical structure, power-imbalance, competition, transactional culture, costs of innovation and collaboration, regulation, alternative platform models	Delivered
Experts focus group discussion	Seven participants: European and US academics, platform owners (Monizo and CrowdSkills), a business analyst from Great Digital Company and a senior IPSE member; key themes: inclusive potential of digital work platforms, dualization (clickwork vs highly-skilled work), lack of support structure, alternative platform models, cooperative movement	Delivered
Analysis of focus group discussions	Full transcription of focus groups Coding using NVivo11 software	Delivered Continued
Policy aspects and business models of Digital Work Platforms	Participation in relevant events: • Open 2017: Platform Cooperatives, 16-17 February 2017, Goldsmiths, University of London • NESTA Digital Social Innovation Event, 16 May 2017, London • Public Sector Show, 27 June 2017, London Follow-ups and interviews with legal advisor and NESTA representative	Delivered
Proposal submission	Preparation and submission of research proposal (DigiWIP 2.0) to Horizon 2020 ICT-11-2017, Collective Awareness Platforms for Sustainability and Social Innovation with the budget of €1.7M. International partners with coordinator in Athens. Southampton researchers would cover academic aspects of designing new platforms of digital work. See attachment	Delivered

3. Industry partners and policy aspects

IPSE, the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed, has provided significant support for the project through promoting our research at the Global Workshop on Freelancing & Self-Employment Research and the free provision of their premises for both focus group discussions on the 24th January 2017 in London.

The Hansard Society could not, as planned, support the project through providing discussion partners on the policy and legal aspects of digital work platforms due to their involvement with Brexit negotiations. Therefore, we used policy and public sector events (see Table 1) to recruit representatives from the public and private sectors for interviews and discussions on legal and policy aspects of working on digital platforms.

4. Quo vadis?

At the 13th conference of the European Sociological Association (ESA) in Athens (29 Aug – 1 Sept 2017), we will present a paper in the Economic Sociology session: *Exploring the Potential for Collaboration and Inclusion in the New Economy: The case of digital work platforms*. The presentation will feed into a journal paper we are currently working on: *Current and Future Digital Work Platforms: The Changing Work Experiences of Freelancers*. The paper will be submitted to the Special Issue 'Digital Futures of Small Businesses and Entrepreneurial Opportunity' of the journal *Futures* by 15 Nov 2017. The paper analyses work experiences of freelancers working on different types of digital work platforms: hierarchical/global (Upwork), cooperative (Fairmondo) and social/local ones (CrowdSkills). The empirical basis for the paper is formed by the focus group discussions conducted in January 2017 and interviews with freelancers and platform owners we are still conducting (ca. 12-15 interviews).

5. Budget

Our budget of £12,492 has been fully spent (see attachment).

Activity(T)	Actual	Budget
Consumables	277.00	2,100.00
DI Academic Staff	10,842.31	9,642.74
Other Costs	6.00	0.00
Salary	0.00	0.00
Overseas Travel	593.00	0.00
UK Travel	774.43	750.00
	12,492.74	**12,492.74**

Expenses for delivery of the Focus Groups in London were less than budgeted. This is why we used money that was freed up for conference fees for Dr Domecka for the ESA. We had also planned a presentation on different types of digital platforms at the SASE conference in June in Lyon. However, Dr Domecka could not attend due to health reasons. On 26 July 2017 we received the reimbursement of the SASE conference fee of £189.79. A full reimbursement was not possible.