

The silence(s) of migration in Sweden's policy for the gig/platform economy

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Abstract

Migrants constitute the majority of vulnerable workers in digitally mediated work, and they face wide-scale labour exploitation and exclusions from existing labour systems of rights. In Nordic countries, it is often assumed the welfare state will regulate the gig economy, but due to ambiguous understandings of what the gig economy is, proposals for interventions are often limited to debates and concerns around topics such as taxation. The Swedish state is shifting to recognize migrants and the gig/platform economy, but their positions in policy arenas remain unknown. Drawing on conceptual approaches of policy silences, which highlight the agentic process of exclusion through the production of strategic quietness/absence, this presentation will examine the ways policy formulation positions digitally mediated work, workers, and work sites, as well migrants, and evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats posed by these underlying policy debates. The presentation includes a critical review of data drawn from a combination of machine learning, text mining and in-depth content analysis, based on 25 Swedish Government Official Reports (SOU series) issued between 2016 and 2022. The presentation will provide insights into the co-production of silences on migrants within state policy formulations, highlighting the tensions within welfare-labour relations.

Biographies

Natasha A. Webster is a PhD holder and Senior Lecturer at Örebro University in Sweden. She is also a feminist economic geographer specializing in gender, work, entrepreneurship, and migration. Natasha is Principal Investigator for a FORMAS project in Sweden, researching the gig economy and migrants in Sweden, and she is also an Associate Editor of *Emotion, Space and Society* and Editorial Board Member of *Digital Geography and Society*.

Qian Zhang, PhD and researcher, at Stockholm University, is a human geographer specializing in migration, environmental politics and critical geography. Her recent research interests focus on understanding the digital geographies of our rapidly changing social and economic life mediated through platformization. She has worked closely with Webster in the FORMAS project exploring the relationship between the gig economy and migrants. She will lead a new project on exploring (migrants') digital practices in rural Sweden and what these mean for social equalities (VR, 2022-05314).