

Democracy and Participation in the 21st Century Conference

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Abstract Proposal

STREAM 1: Innovation, Digitilization and Participation

Session 1.3. Democratic participation in the “platform economy” ? Digitalization, self-employment and networks challenging both companies and unions

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Exploring a new producer-consumer interaction model for facilitating collective action in the collaborative economy

Abstract

Digital networking technology has helped to bring about the networked society, including new forms of organization and production. In what has been called the collaborative economy, online networking sites act as platforms to mediate between individual freelance workers and customers. These platforms benefit customers as they can find the lowest price for products and services worldwide, but workers do not have the job security or benefits that workers in more traditional organizations have. The collaborative economy also undermines traditional forms of collective action, particularly trade unions, who have lost members in recent years. However, these traditional forms of organization, including cooperatives and guild-like organizations as well as trade unions, are arguably more relevant than ever as growing numbers of individual freelance workers interact with their customers via online platforms.

Following reflections on fifteen years of trade union software quality assurance initiatives, particularly the Swedish UserAward program, we realize that there are potential benefits in combining aspects of cooperative, guild and trade union models to promote collective action in the context of the growing collaborative economy. We examine the role that these models could play in enabling user participation and influence and bring them together in the form of a conceptual model which we have called a Software Review Alliance Board. The contribution we make is to propose how a Review Alliance Board model can be an alternative strategy for both software producers and trade unions in assuring the quality of workplace software. Through this model, union members, software programmers, workplace managers and researchers can participate in collective action through the Alliance Board. We propose that a Value Sensitive Design process that considers both direct and indirect stakeholders is appropriate to implement this model.