

A labour market of opportunities?

*A case study of the Norwegian
labour platform Finn Småjobber*

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Summary

In this thesis I have performed a qualitative case study of the Norwegian labour platform Finn Småjobber. Finn Småjobber was an on-demand gig work platform, that distributed “small jobs” between private people, in the period between early 2014 and July 2019.

In my case study, I explore two interrelated research questions: 1) How did Finn Småjobber seek to control the labour process? 2) How did workers experience working through the platform? In my study I have constructed and applied an analytical framework, built on existing literature on platform labour. This framework focuses on seven key dimensions that I argue are critical to understanding the distinctiveness of different labour platforms: 1) The platform-worker relationship, 2) degree of professional specialization, 3) barriers of entry, 4) platform model, 5) techno-normative control, 6) form of remuneration and 7) risk and flexibility.

I have conducted interviews with both representatives from Finn Småjobber, and workers that have used the platform, to explore both how the platform sought to control the labour process, and how this was experienced by workers. As is the aim of case study research, I use theory on platform labour both to illuminate my case, and also to contribute to a general understanding of the tactics applied by labour platforms. Through empirical examples, I conclude that Finn Småjobber applied many of the tactics common in platform labour, but also show several case specific characteristics of how these tactics were used.

In my interviews with workers, I found that Finn Småjobbers control mechanisms led to workers developing different strategies for finding and “winning jobs”, among other things through underbidding other workers to outcompete them. I also find that the platforms control model laid grounds for a buyer’s market, where workers had competing with each other were pushed to carry most of the financial risks.

As Finn Småjobber closed midway during my work with the thesis, I have also included a brief discussion on the reasons for, and consequences of the platform closing.

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1. Introduction

In recent years digital platforms have become an area of both economic and academic interest. The term “platform economy” encapsulates a plethora of different types of online platforms, facilitating different forms of transactions in different markets. Defined broadly as digital arenas connecting two or more actors (Srnicek, 2017), these forms of businesses, with Uber and Airbnb as the two most prominent examples, are changing the economy by offering new ways of connecting buyers and sellers. Often they seemingly do not construct new markets, but rather rearrange already existing ones; Taxi services were available before Uber, hotel services were available before Airbnb. Labels such as sharing economy, gig economy and platform economy are being used interchangeably to describe this new phenomenon.

This paper explores *labour platforms*, which can most broadly be defined as digital platforms distributing labour power. As of yet, labour platforms is not a big part of the Norwegian labour market, and little is known about how the workers experience working through these platforms (Alsos et al., 2017; Jesnes & Oppegaard, 2020). In this thesis I have conducted a case study of the Norwegian labour platform Finn Småjobber, which was the biggest platform in Norway distributing gig work - “småjobber” – from its launch in late 2013, until it closed on the 1 of June 2019 (Mebust Erichsen, 2019). My thesis aims at exploring platform labour through an analysis of how platforms affect the labour process.

Finn Småjobber was an extension of the existing Finn.no-marketplace, that distributed jobs within a quite specific tax regulation: small on-demand tasks conducted by private people inside or in proximity to private homes, where a private person could pay up to 6000 NOK to the workers doing the job (Skatteetaten, 2019). The fact that the most popular Norwegian website had its own labour platform sparked my initial interest. I wanted to understand how Finn Småjobber was controlling the activity on this new platform, and how workers experienced using it. The fact that the platform decided to shut down its operations midway through my work with the thesis, made it feel even more important to capture the essence and experiences of this phenomenon.

1.1 Towards a geographical understanding of labour platforms

Why should these platforms be of special interest to geographers? I will argue that geography is perhaps one of the disciplines best equipped to analyse platforms, with its explicit acknowledgement of place and space as important dimensions. With many of the biggest platforms operating on a global scale, the geographical perspective is especially well suited for trying to understand how these platforms take different forms and use different strategies in different places. The emergence and proliferation of ICT and internet technology, has opened up to the discussions of whether or not place has lost its relevance, and how geographers should conceptualise it (Dodge & Kitchin, 2005; S. Graham, 1998). The fact that transactions are being made online, in “cyber-space”, does not entail that it is placeless. In fact, one could say that it the digital and virtual often actualises the very essence of place; Uber-drivers and Airbnb-apartments are fundamentally place bound.

This in turn, raises a number of potential challenges, when “global” platforms meets national and local culture and legislation. As discussed by Hotvedt (2018), platforms operate within a variety different legal frameworks, which always has a geographical dimension such as national labour regulations, tax regulations and so forth. Also, platforms do not just operate in different legal contexts, they are also operating in different social contexts. Hence, when we are seeking to understand how platforms work, geographers are especially aware of the fact that platforms will have different spatial expressions in different places. This will be discussed further in my thesis, through theoretical perspectives on the modification of space, through human interaction with virtual spaces in chapter two. An explicit acknowledgement of the spatial expression of platforms is important to fully understand how these platforms are affecting and being affected by the places that they operate.

Not reflecting on the potential impact of these forms of labour platforms on other services would be naïve – we cannot for instance discuss Uber without also discussing its potential impact on local taxi markets. Hence, when analysing labour platforms, it is important to keep in mind how they could potentially be changing and challenging already existing markets.

1.2 Aim and structure of the thesis

With new subjects emerging in social sciences, there is also a need for new ways to study, analyse and understand them. In this thesis explore theories on labour platforms and combine them with a geographical understanding of the relationship between virtual and real space, with three overarching purposes in mind: First, I seek to contribute to the existing literature on platform labour, by proposing a systematic analytic framework, consisting of seven dimensions that should be analysed in order to understand how different platforms control the labour process. Second, I seek to give an empirical contribution to existing research on platform labour in a Norwegian context. Lastly, I seek to give voice to the workers that are using these platforms, in order to broadening the understanding of how these platforms are controlling and affecting workers.

Through interviews with workers and platform owners, and an analysis of the platform action space, I aim to answer two related research questions:

RQ1: *How did Finn Småjobber seek to control the labour process?*

RQ2: *How did workers experience working through the platform?*

These research questions will be answered in a two part analysis, where I first identify the control mechanisms the platform sought to utilise, and then look at how workers experienced working under these.

The paper is structured as follows: First, I give an account of my understanding of the relationship between physical and virtual space, through the concept *code/space*. Second, I build on this spatial understanding through a theoretical overview of the concepts *platforms* and *labour platforms*, which are central to understanding the phenomenon of which this thesis explores. Thirdly, I outline the analytic framework that has been used in my thesis, discussing each of the seven dimensions of labour platforms that I argue needs special focus in research on labour platforms. In the fourth section, I discuss my choice of a case study approach, my choice of methods and data collection, and what ethical and practical challenges I have faced along the way. In section six, I use my analytic framework to give a detailed account of the space that Finn Småjobber sought to create, and what choices and tactics they used to control the labour process. In section seven, I then use these findings to analyse findings from my

interviews with workers. In section eight, I have included a brief discussion of the platform closing, what workers thought of this, and how this has affected them. In section nine, I summarise my findings, and propose potential avenues for further research on this topic.

2. Spatial understandings of the web: Virtual space and code/space

In the following chapter, I discuss the geographical concept space, and how the internet could be understood as an expansion of physical space. I use Dodge and Kitchins concept *code/space*, to argue that real and virtual spaces are entangled, rather than distinct from each other. Further, I argue that different online platforms should be understood as distinct code/spaces that facilitate and control different transactions.

2.1 The relationship between real and virtual space

Geographers have long been interested in space as a geographical dimension, new technology has led to new ways of conceptualising space (S. Graham, 1998). With the internet becoming an ever-increasing part of our daily lives, the question of how to spatially conceptualise it has become a part of the geographical discussion. Is it meaningful to speak of the internet as a distinct space?

In line with the understanding of Kitchin and Dodge (2011), I argue that the internet should be conceptualised as a distinct *code/space*; a space that only exists through the use of code, which in this context refers to the software that is part of the spatial formation. Code/spaces are spaces that are reliant on code to the extent that if the code stops working, so does the space. *Coded space*, on the other hand is space that utilises software, but still functions without it. An example of this could be an auditorium, where the lecturer can still hold a presentation even if her Power Point stops working. The increased use of technology and software, can transform coded spaces into code/space, through the space being so reliant on it that it ceases to function without it. Dodge and Kitchin use the airport check-in area as an example of such a code/space: it has become so dependent on code that it does not exist/function without it. This reasoning is based on an ontogenetic theorization of space, where space is not seen as fixed, but rather seen as in constant state of becoming.

Kellerman (2014) argues that as the internet is fundamentally dependent on code, and hence that the internet itself can be viewed as a code/space. Kellerman argues that with the emergence and proliferation of the Internet, individuals now operate in two intertwined spaces: real and virtual space. The virtual space, he argues, constitutes a second, complementary action space. Our routines, interactions and actions are increasingly being moved to, or entangled with virtual space, converging with our pre-existing real (physical) action space. This expansion of individual action into the virtual space, has expanded it from being a simple representation of real space, to itself constituting an action space: “[T]he more recent development of human ability to perform widely on the Web through the maturing of the Web as a second action space call for looking at it also as a social space by itself, beyond it being merely spaces of representation for real space” (Kellerman, 2014, p. 33). The increased “technologization” of space leads to what I label *virtual entanglement* – increasingly more activities and interactions in real space are being entangled with virtual space: “It seems that the tremendous integration of information technology and Internet into all spheres of economic and social lives, makes it impossible now to manage and manipulate real social space without the use of, or reference to, virtual space” (Kellerman, 2014, p. 12).

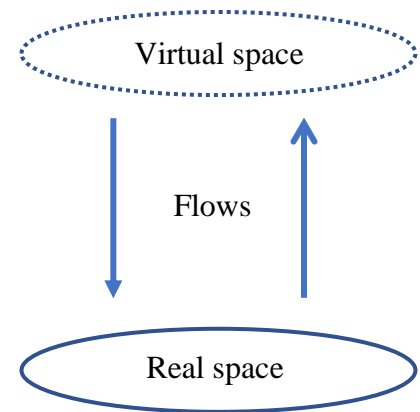


Figure 1: The relationship between virtual and real space

From this point, I argue that geographers should think of real and virtual spaces as entangled: the increased integration of real and virtual space shows that it is rendered artificial to speak of them as separate. In line with Dodge and Kitchin’s ontogenetic perspective, these spaces are constantly being (re)made through our interaction with technology. However, it does not follow from this that the virtual space is neutral; it is important to critically assess how the virtual space is coded with specific purposes. Rather than viewing the internet as one large action space, I argue we should analyse the internet as a web of distinct code/spaces, each of which have been designed for different purposes and are being used for different aims: these code/spaces come to be through specific interactions between technology and humans.

This ontogenetic perspective of virtual space, enable us to analyse virtual code/spaces as action spaces. These spaces are not static spaces, but rather come to existence through our interaction with technologies. As our interactions in real space are increasingly entangled with virtual space, the two spaces merge into one: when utilising a digital labour platform to do work, the labour process both takes place in real virtual and the physical space. In the next section I will

discuss theoretical perspectives on digital platforms and platform labour, and how to analyse these code/spaces.

3. Theoretical perspectives on digital platforms and platform labour

In this section I will discuss theoretical perspectives on platform labour. First, I broadly define *digital platforms* and *platform labour* in general, before moving on to outline the seven dimensions of platform labour that serve as my analytic framework.

3.1 What are digital platforms?

Many different labels have been used in attempts to capture the essence of the new online economy, each of which is highlighting different key characteristics. The “sharing economy” label focuses on how under-utilised assets are being commodified and capitalised in new ways (Frenken & Schor, 2017; Geissinger et al., 2018). “Crowdwork” on the other hand, focuses on how the internet can connect consumers to a “crowd” of workers for different, mostly online, tasks (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019). The “gig economy” is a third label, that focuses on the “gig” aspect of labour through platforms, with workers being hired for one gig at a time by different customers or employers (Woodcock & Graham, 2020).

The labels we use are important, as they influence how we study platforms. As an example, applying labels such as “sharing”, potentially underplay the fact that platforms “monetise human effort and consumer assets” (Kenney & Zysman, 2016, p. 62). In my analysis, I use the terms *platform economy* and *labour platforms* to describe this form of work. In the broadest terms, platforms could be defined as “digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact” (Srnicek, 2017, p. 43). By positioning themselves as intermediaries between different parties, the platforms connect different users and services through the use of internet and communications technology. This has lead Kenney and Zysman to argue that the platform economy is reshaping the space of capitalist accumulation (Kenney & Zysman, 2020).

Srnicek (2017) distinguishes between five different types of platforms: advertising platforms, cloud platforms, industrial platforms, product platforms and lean platforms. The rest of this paper will focus mainly on product platforms and lean platforms, as they are the two that are most directly involved in the transaction, regulation and exploitation of labour power. The difference between product and lean platforms, is that while product platforms owns the asset they are distributing, lean platforms do not. Uber and Zipcar serves as a good example of this

difference: Uber does not own any cars, only the platform distributing rides, while for Zipcar also owns the cars used for the rides (Srniczek, 2017, p. 71). Hence, Uber is a lean platform, while Zipcar is a product platform. The important point here is the *degree of outsourcing*. In the case of lean platforms, they are operating with a hyper-outsourced model where “workers are outsourced, fixed capital is outsourced, maintenance costs are outsourced and training is outsourced” (Srniczek, 2017, p. 76). Another well-known example of a lean platform is Airbnb, which does not own any of the housing distributed on the platform.

Srniczek highlights two essential characteristics of all platforms. First, rather than establishing new markets, they construct digital infrastructures that position themselves between parties in already existing markets. In the case of Airbnb, the platform has positioned itself as an intermediary between the person renting out a room or an apartment, and the person seeking accommodation. What was new about Airbnb when it became popular was not the renting out of accommodation, but rather the way in which it was organised. These platforms become new arenas where actors interact with each other, while the platforms are recording the use and extracting data in the process (Srniczek, 2017, p. 44). In other words platforms represent new ways of organising existing relationships between different actors.

Importantly, this organising is not neutral. As Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreborn (2019, p. 4) point out, one reappearing assumption is that the platforms merely function as “middle men operating as a neutral party”. This is misleading, because “it fails to acknowledge that technology is a carrier of particular socio-economic interests” (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019, p. 4). Srniczek makes similar remarks, arguing that platforms “embody a politics” through the way in which they are designed with specific purposes (Srniczek, 2017, p. 47). Platforms have been coded (both in a literal and social sense) with specific goals in mind for the platform firms, and these goals do not necessarily align with the interests of its users: Code and software could be seen as possessing secondary agency, “supporting or extending the agency” of the business (Mackenzie, 2006, p. 8). In other words, the way in which these platforms enter into and rearrange existing markets need to be critically examined.

The second platform characteristic Srniczek highlights, is that platforms produce and are dependent on so-called “network effects”. As more users come to a platform and the network of users grows, the more valuable the platform gets for both its owners and its users – and as a result, the more powerful and dominant it gets (Srniczek, 2017, p. 45). The fact that platforms

are concentrating interactions and transactions between parties, drawing on network effects in the process, means that platforms could potentially expand exponentially often fostering monopolies (Schmidt, 2017). This results in more data and more control over markets. Hence, successful platforms have a tendency and a desire towards monopolies, Facebook and Amazon perhaps being the two clearest examples.

In addition to critically examining the platforms neutrality, it is also important not to be blind to the spatial component of platforms, and the fact that they operate *in place*. Product platforms can be seen as more tied to place than lean platforms, as they have fixed assets. When it comes to labour power however, this will *always* be fixed, in the sense that it is always conducted *somewhere*. This means that platforms must also be understood in relation to the particular context of which it is operating. Changes in platforms could have different outcomes in different places: technology and code in interaction with people could be seen as co-creating space. This point lies on the assumption that technology is always used *somewhere*. This paper focuses on the use of platform technology in a *Norwegian* context, critically examining how the general mechanisms of platforms and platform labour comes to show in Norway.

3.2 What are labour platforms?

So what, then, is a *labour platform*? We have now defined platforms in general as digital infrastructures positioning themselves between, and connecting buyers and sellers of different services. Labour platforms could hence be understood as *platforms connecting buyers and sellers of labour power*. With the advancement in technology, the “work process can now be organized over the internet, usually through an app” (Woodcock & Graham, 2020, p. 5). The question then becomes what is the role of the platforms in the transaction of labour?

Gandini argues that a labour platform should be understood as “a digital based point of production, intended as the ‘place’ where the labour process is enacted upon workers” (Gandini, 2019, p. 2). The labour process can be understood as the means by which capital “creates” workers, by transforming the workers’ potential labour power into actual labour. In the case of labour platforms, the platform and the way it is set up represents capitals means of organising and controlling the labour process, Gandini argues: “platforms act as the milieu within which the capital-labour relation is enacted upon workers(...) Gig workers log in to an app and, in so

doing, come to be subject to an external authority” (Gandini, 2019, p. 7). The technology of the platforms “matches supply and demand by connecting a large pool of workers to a large (indefinite) number of customers at high speed and with minimum transaction costs.” (Hotvedt, 2018, p. 56).

Todoli-Signes argues that in the platform business model, the means of production are technological, hence the platform itself could be seen as the means of production in platform labour (Todolí-Signes, 2017, p. 200). To conduct work through the platform, you are reliant on it in the same way as a worker was on the factory owned by their boss. In the same way that traditional labour has tended to require ‘spatial proximities and temporal synchronicities’ so too does platforms, as the work “happens in a specific place and time” (Woodcock & Graham, 2020, p. 51). To summarize, the labour platforms to some extent represent both the point and means of production, as they are a key part of the labour process. This, I argue, is why these labour platforms should be of interest to both researchers and the wider public. The fact that labour platforms are controlling and (re)mediating parts of the labour market, suggests that it is important to scrutinise what tools and tactics platforms use, and what effects this has on workers.

Labour platforms are also closely linked to what is often referred to as the “gig economy”, that is “characterized by independent contracting that happens through, via, and on digital platforms” (Woodcock & Graham, 2020, p. 3). Stewart and Stanford have highlighted four characteristics of gig work on labour platforms: varying and irregular work hours based on customer demand; some or all of the necessary equipment is provided by the workers themselves; workers are paid at a piece rate; and the work is being arranged and facilitated through an app and/or a digital platform (Stewart & Stanford, 2017). As Woodcock and Graham argue, different forms of on demand task work is not something historically new. What is new is the way of organising these gigs through platforms. The platforms represents “a new organisational form, stepping in as an intermediary in increasingly broader kinds of work, collecting both data and a cut of the payments made for services” (Woodcock & Graham, 2020, p. 61). This means that studies of different platforms are important to understand their impact on labour. To do this, we need to be able to compare and distinguish the various platforms, to identify their differences and similarities. In section 3.3 I propose an analytic framework that can be used to distinguish between platforms, in order to understand how a given platform “works” for the workers?

Before moving on to the analytical framework, one last general distinction in platform labour should be emphasized: the level of “geographic stickiness” on different labour platforms. Woodcock and Graham distinguishes between what they call “geographically tethered work” and “cloudwork”. The former refers to digitally distributed labour that has to be done in a specific location, and that has mostly existed before platforms, such as pizza delivery, taxi services, cleaning services and so forth. This work is not new, but the organisation of the work is: the platform takes “existing forms of work that happen in particular places and reorganises them through a digital platform” (Woodcock & Graham, 2020, p. 51).

In contrast to this geographically tethered work, “cloudwork” refers to different forms of online freelancing and digital microwork: tasks that are both being distributed *and* conducted online, where the execution of the work does not need to be done in a specific location (Woodcock & Graham, 2020, p. 6). Examples of cloudwork platforms include Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, Upwork and Freelancer. The distinction between geographically tethered work and cloudwork aligns well with Howcroft and Bergvall-Kåreboms (2019) distinction between physical and digital tasks. It should be noted that both these forms of work are changing the relationships between workers themselves and the worker’s relationships to their employers. In the case of cloudwork, which is not geographically tethered, work can now be done anywhere, potentially allowing a “mass migration of labour without the migration of workers” (Woodcock & Graham, 2020, p. 53). Digital platforms have according to Woodcock and Graham made “a lot of work less [geographically] sticky” (2020, p. 54).

In this thesis, I will predominantly focus on geographically tethered work – work that is in its very nature linked to a specific location. Woodcock and Graham argues that the requirement for work to be done in a particular place, means that “the platform exerts more control, often involving many of the same controls that a traditional waged employer would deploy” (2020, p. 43). As I will argue later, this point needs to be elaborated with a sensitivity of the relative autonomy that given workers have. Individual workers will to various degrees be dependent on the platforms; a worker that is in a position of “just” doing a couple of gigs on the side of his/her regular work, is obviously not equally dependent on the platform wage as a person that solely gets its income from, and is fully financially dependent on the money s/he earns from the platform.

Another important point about the power of platforms, concerns their role in facilitating transactions. As the platforms position themselves between buyers and sellers (Alsos et al., 2017, p. 15), they also have the ability to monitor, moderate and control the interaction between buyers and sellers that interact on the platform. The fact that platforms, apart from the physical servers and office spaces from which they operate, mainly consists of *software* also means that the resources needed to implement changes in the labour process becomes easier. If they want to implement changes, they do not need to invest in a new factory or training for employees. The labour platforms could thus potentially launch new rules and change the game over night through software updates or updated terms and conditions. This, one could argue, gives the platforms even more power over the labour process.

Whether it is geographically tethered or cloudwork, different platforms will have different ways of organising labour. The many different platform business models means that it is not an easy one-size-fits-all when it comes to platforms: both in terms of the actual (control of) work and the employment relations there are important differences between platforms. This in turn means that beyond the general definitions of common traits among *all* platforms as outlined above, we need to further distil some traits and typologies that can be used to explore what is unique to a given platform. In this case study, I explore what is distinct about my case Finn Småjobber, and the dimensions outlined below will serve as my analytical lens throughout the rest of the thesis.

3.3 Analytical framework: Dimensions of labour platforms

In the following sections I will look more closely at *how* the labour platforms control the labour process. In the capitalist labour process, one of the key challenges for employers is to determine how to “transform potential labour power into actual work” (Rainnie et al., 2010, p. 103). This is done through different tactics for controlling and coordinating the labour process. In the same way that the setup of a factory will shape the labour process, so will the setup of a labour platform. The type of work and how it is organized gives different opportunities and experiences to workers. While the academic interest in platform labour is increasing, there is still limited theoretical discussions on how to systematically study individual platforms.

I therefore seek to contribute to the academic literature by proposing an analytical framework, consisting of seven key dimensions that should be systematically analysed to capture the distinct code/space of a given labour platform: (1) platform-worker relation, (2) degree of

professional specialisation, (3) barriers of entry, (4) the platform model, (5) techno-normative control, (6) form of remuneration and (7) flexibility and risk. Some of the dimensions overlap in some areas, but – as will be argued – a particular focus on each dimension is necessary to get a nuanced and in-depth understanding of the platform’s labour process. Using these dimensions to study a platform helps us analyse and define what is unique about a given platform. Based on the theoretical discussions in each dimension, I also outline some working hypotheses of how Finn Småjobber will operate, that will then be tested in the analysis.

3.3.1 Platform-worker relation: employee or self-employed?

One of the fundamental topics in discussions of platform labour, is the relationship between platforms and workers: are the workers employees, self-employed, free lancers or something else? These discussions are more than mere semantics. Labels such as gig economy and sharing economy risk concealing the essential ingredient on the platforms: labour. According to De Stefano for instance, the label *gig economy* “is often used to indicate a sort of parallel dimension in which labour protection and employment regulation are assumed not to apply by default” (De Stefano, 2016, p. 478). More importantly, different employment relations entails different rights for workers and responsibilities for platforms. When studying labour platforms, we need to critically analyse how platforms position themselves in relation to their workers.

One of the reasons that this relationship is complex, is that platform work is “performed within a triangular (or multi-angular) structure” (Hotvedt, 2018, p. 56) between the worker, the customer and the platform. By blurring out the market and the hierarchical relation between the firm and the workers, platforms are able to “profit from organizing labour on a large scale, while apparently limiting legal responsibilities and the need for investments” (2018, p. 56).

So why is this so important? The strategy of classifying workers as self-employers is, as Woodcock and Graham puts it, “a strategy that clearly offers more benefits to platforms than it does to workers” (2020, p. 44). By framing workers as independent contractors, risk and responsibilities are shifted onto the workers (De Stefano, 2016, p. 478). For workers, working through platforms means both freedom and dependence: “Platform work typically has both autonomous and subordinated features” (Hotvedt, 2018, p. 59). In one sense, you are often free to choose when and how much you want to work, much like a freelancer. Yet, once you are

working, you are subordinating yourself to the external authority of the platform, relying on its means of production to get work. As pointed out by Jesnes, while there is still no formal legal definition for platform work, it “shares similarities with atypical work, such as on-call, zero-hour contracts or temporary agency work” (Jesnes, 2019).

The question thus becomes whether the worker is working *through* or *for* the platform? In the case of Foodora-workers in Norway, the cyclists (couriers) are using their own bikes and phones, but are employed by the company. This results in a number of rights that for instance Uber drivers do not have: set hourly pay, time sheets, sick pay etc. The recent 2019 Foodora-strike in Norway illustrates well that once you are acknowledged as a employee, and not as a contractor, you are better (legal) rights to make demands from your employer. After five weeks of being on strike, the workers were granted a collective agreement (Haugan et al., 2019). This illustrates how the relation between the platform and the workers has clear implications in terms of payment and rights to collective bargaining. Hotvedt (2016) has argued that the way platforms use technology to control the labour process, could substantiate an employment relationship. In other words, when we are analysing platforms, we must be aware of the subordination and control they instil.

The standard employment relationship is also intimately linked to the decommodification of labour. As identified by Esping-Andersen, the degree of (de)commodification of labour depends on to what extent workers have forms of financial security outside of the labour market – what he calls “market dependence” (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 106). Rubery and Grimshaw argues that labour platforms challenges to the standard employment relationship represents such a form of commodification of labour, as most welfare states tie many workers rights to standard employment (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2016). Increased use of non-standard forms of work also increases market dependence for workers, as these forms of labour does not entail the same rights.

To summarize, loose relationships between the platform and the worker is a key characteristic of much platform labour. When studying a specific platform, this should hence be one of the factors to look at: What is the formal relation between the worker and the platform? How does the platform position itself in the transaction? In line with theory on labour platforms, we can thus formulate the following working hypothesis: Finn Småjobber will seek to establish a loose

connection between themselves and workers, by limiting their involvement in transactions and outsourcing responsibilities traditionally associated with employment to its workers.

3.3.2 Degree of professional specialisation

Another important point to examine is what sort of work the platform is distributing. As pointed out by Kenney and Zysman, “Uber, Airbnb, TaskRabbit, Handy, and other platform firms are transforming industries by connecting ‘producers’ with customers in new ways. In some cases, this is displacing or threatening existing, often regulated, service providers, such as taxis and hotels” (Kenney & Zysman, 2016, p. 63). Hence, it is important when analysing platforms to map out what potential threats they pose to existing industries.

Prassl distinguishes between *task-specific platforms*, such as Uber and Foodora, and *generalist platforms* such as Fiverr and TaskRabbit (Prassl, 2018). I apply a similar distinction, based on the degree of specialisation on the platform, and distinguish between specialised and generic platforms. In addition to how specific the jobs are, it is also crucial to look at the level of professionalisation on the platform, and what skills are required to do the job: Is it high- or low skill, and does it require any formal expertise? This way of looking at the degree of professionalisation in platform labour, resembles that of Røtnes et al. (2019), who distinguish between a knowledge-intensive platform economy and a low-skilled platform economy.

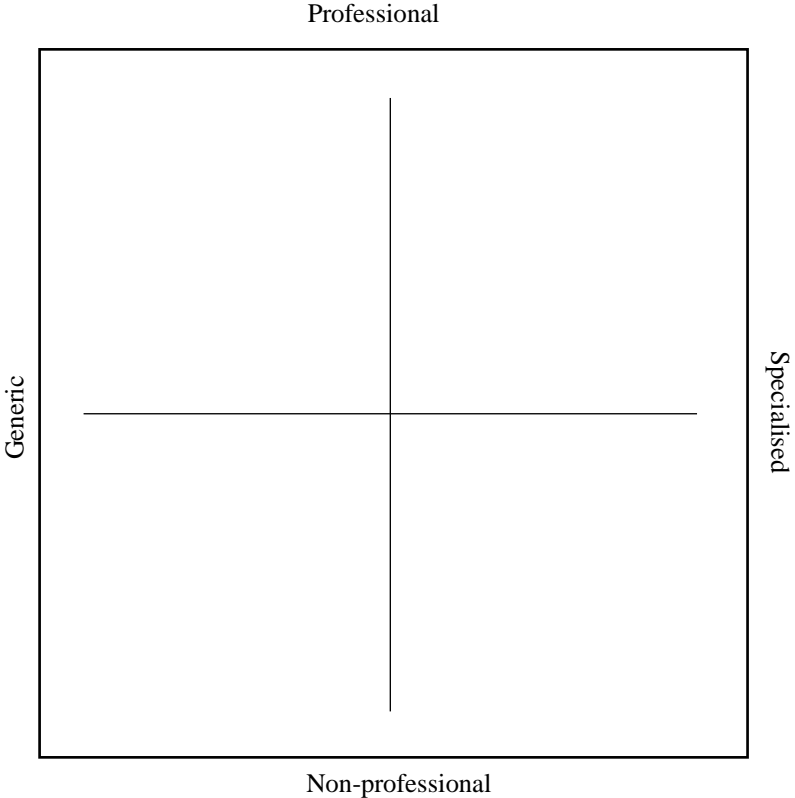


Figure 2: Professionalisation and specialisation matrix

Platforms can thus be distinguished along two intersecting lines: High to low degrees of specialisation, and high to low degrees of professionalisation. Following from this, we can place labour platforms into a matrix, based on how professional the tasks are, and how specialized they are (see figure 2). We can then use this to analyse the platform in relation to what Silver

calls *marketplace bargaining power*, which relates to the structural power of the worker based on the workers relative position in the economic system. Silver highlights three forms that marketplace bargaining power can take: “(1) the possession of scarce skills that are in demand by employers, (2) low levels of general unemployment, and (3) the ability of workers to pull out of the labour market entirely and survive on non-wage sources of income” (Silver, 2003, p. 13).

Based on this theory, workers that possess skills that are scarce and in high demand, will have a stronger marketplace bargaining power than workers with lower skills, that are more easily replaced. A low-skilled worker competing in a labour market with high levels of employment and a low level of social security outside of the labour market, possesses weak marketplace bargaining power. This point demonstrates the importance of considering which workers are using a platform, and under what circumstances. Different workers have different possibilities to both enter and compete on labour platforms.

When this framework is applied to a platform analysis, we can outline the following working hypotheses: a platform with a high degree of specialisation and professionalisation could a) reduce the competition between job seekers, b) increasing the leverage / bargaining power of the sellers of labour power vis-à-vis buyers. Conversely, a platform with low degrees of specialisation and professionalisation could lead to a) a larger pool of workers competing for the same jobs, b) increasing the leverage of the buyers vis-à-vis workers, by giving them opportunities to pick between a larger share of workers.

3.3.3 Barriers of entry

The relationship between platform and worker, and the degree of professional specialisation is linked to the third dimension: barriers of entry. Here we are looking at what is required of workers to join the platform; how does the worker join the platform? Different platforms have different requirements that workers needs to fulfil – an Uber driver needs a driver’s license for instance -, and different forms of screening workers before they join the platform. We thus have to look at what is required for the worker to get access to the means of production - the platform; How does the worker become a platform worker?

Here we can distinguish between high and low barriers of entry. High barriers means strict vetting and tight control of who works through the platform. Low barriers means little or no vetting or control of who joins the platform. As the connection between the platform and the workers typically are loose, the platform is faced with the challenge of ensuring a constant supply of labour. By providing low barriers of entry, it could potentially attract and supply a larger number of workers on the platform. This, however, could in turn affect the marketplace bargaining power, increasing competition between workers.

As Prassl (2018) points out, despite differences among platforms, a common characteristic is that they depend on a large crowd of workers to be available to work on-demand at all times. In other words, they need to keep the pool of potential workers connected to the platform large enough to be able to serve jobs as quickly as possible, also keeping a steady stream of new workers connecting to the platform. One could expect that a stronger connection between the platform and the workers, leads to the platform instilling stricter control mechanisms of who gets to join the platform. If the connection between the two parties is weak, as in the platform classifying workers as self-employed, the platform potentially becomes more accessible to workers, as lower restrictions and requirements are put in place. As a consequence, a larger pool of workers could easily join the platform.

Hence, we can formulate the following working hypothesis: Finn Småjobber platform will seek to minimise the barriers of entry, in order to secure a constant access to labour power – the weaker the connection between the platform and workers is, the less platforms will need to control who uses it to work, resulting in lower barriers of entry. This in turn, can be expected to affect the marketplace bargaining, as a greater number of workers compete for the same jobs.

3.3.4 Platform model: connecting, controlling and outsourcing

As previously pointed out, one of the main characteristics of platforms is that they position themselves as mediators between buyers and sellers. According to Gandini, the labour platforms put themselves in-between actors and “re-mediate the social relations that determine the distribution and appropriation of labour” (2019, p. 1044). Accordingly, a key area of interest in the study of labour platforms should thus be what strategies the platforms use to mediate the transaction: How, in practice, did workers get work?

Here we are looking directly at how the platform is coded, in the sense of how it is set up to function for both workers and customers. By critically examining this, we can better understand the consequences of what Kenney and Zysman (2016, p. 67) call the “constraints of code”. The code sets the rules for the interaction between actors on platforms, and can hence be seen as a crucial part of how the platform controls the labour process.

By studying how the platform is built to operate, we can analyse what sort of action space it offers to workers; What choices and opportunities are available to the workers, and at what stages of the work is the platform involved? One common characteristic among all platforms, is that they connect buyers and sellers of labour by offering a point of communication between the parties: this contact information is to a large extent the essential product that platforms are brokering. As a consequence, platforms will seek to instil an *information asymmetry* (Choudray, 2018, p. 10), controlling as much information as possible, limiting what is visible to buyers and sellers. If this information was easily available, the need for the platforms would to a large degree disappear, as parties would then be able to contact each other directly.

In addition to providing communication, some platforms are also involved as a tool in the actual labour process. Some platforms, such as Uber and Foodora, use algorithms to automate the assigning of tasks to workers – so called algorithmic task assignment. While workers are conducting the jobs, the platform is involved as an essential tool in the labour process, not only for communication, but also for providing workers with directions through a map, and as the point where the parties conduct payments. The more the platform is involved in the labour process, then the more the labour process is entangled with virtual space – the more the labour process is entangled with this virtual space, the more important the platform becomes to the workers as a tool in the work.

In addition to controlling information, labour platforms often also control the allocation of labour, through the use of algorithmic management. The defining characteristic of algorithmic management is that managerial functions are conducted, and to a large part automated, through the use of software algorithms. As an example, in ridesharing, algorithmic management “allows a few human managers in each city to oversee hundreds and thousands of drivers on a global scale” (Lee et al., 2015, p. 2). Platforms use algorithms and machine learning techniques to allocate labour, monitor the platform and control the labour process. The most common form of algorithmic management, comes in the form of algorithmic task assignment, where tasks are

automatically assigned to available workers. This is especially common among lean platforms. As an example, Ubers platform automatically connects available drivers with passengers through algorithms. Alternatively, on some platforms (most often crown work platforms) workers self-assign their jobs – effectively also outsourcing human resource management to workers (Schmidt, 2017).

Based on the literature, we can formulate the following working hypotheses: (1) Finn Småjobber will seek to outsource as much of the labour process and providing of tools to workers as possible, reducing the platforms involvement to a bare minimum. (2) As contact between worker and contractor is the essential asset of the platform, they will create an information asymmetry to govern valuable information from parties before transactions have been made.

3.3.5 Ratings: Techno-normative control mechanisms

A key aspect of labour platforms is the use of what Gandini calls techno-normative control mechanisms (Gandini, 2019). As most platforms seek to maximise the outsourcing of labour, one of the challenges they face is how to monitor and control the increasingly outsourced labour process. The solution is to also outsource most of this control process to customers and workers. This is done through rating and reward systems, where customers review workers after each job, effectively being put in charge of performance reviews. With this outsourced model, platforms need rating systems partly as a quality control mechanism, and also to ensure trust between the platform, workers and customers. Ultimately, “it may be argued that reputational evaluations seem to be fundamentally necessary to the functioning of the gig economy as a form of organization as a result of its decentred nature” (Gandini, 2019, p. 1048).

At the same time, the use of these mechanisms ensures “flexibility and control at the same time” for platforms, by shifting “customer care to individual workers” (De Stefano, 2016, p. 478). Workers are aware that their work will be rated and reviewed, introducing what is often referred to as a technological or algorithmic panopticon (Woodcock, 2020). As the workers know that they are being watched and evaluated, this pushes them to also conduct emotional labour. As pointed out by Gandini, emotional labour “has always been a part of service work” (2019, p. 1047). What is new with the emergence of labour platforms, is how this emotional labour is quantified and visualised, representing a “qualitative intensification of the labour process”.

Rosenblat and Stark exemplify this with Uber drivers that "perform emotional labour in exchange for ratings instead of tips" (Rosenblat & Stark, 2015, p. 3775). When studying individual platforms, we must look at how they take use of these forms of techno-normative controls, and how they are experienced by workers.

Based on theory, we can formulate the following working hypotheses: (1) Finn Småjobber will seeks to outsource the quality control of labour through the use of techno-normative control mechanisms. By having their labour controlled through rating systems (2) workers can be expected to internalize this control and surveillance, feeling pressured to perform emotional labour in order to ensure good ratings.

3.3.6 Form of remuneration

When studying platforms, it is also important to analyse how workers are financially compensated for their work, as different platforms have different payment regimes. These regimes are the platforms way of extracting a surplus from the labour process: through the control of transactions, they are able to take a share of payments.

When examining wages and payment we are predominantly looking at three things. First, we look at if workers are paid pay by the hour, or in a piece rate where workers are payed given, pre-defined sum for a job. As Woodcock and Graham (2020) discusses, on most piece rate platforms, the workers are only paid for the time they are doing a gig, and not for the time they are waiting for or actively seeking new jobs. This can be seen as a form of outsourcing, where the "down time" that was traditionally at the expense of the company, is now outsourced to the workers. As De Stefano has argued, in gig work "workers are provided "just-in-time" and compensated on a "pay-as-you-go" basis; in practice they are only paid during the moments they actually work for a client." (De Stefano, 2016). Although this applies to a lot of labour platforms, some exceptions, like Foodora in Norway, offer hourly wages.

Second, and related, it is important to look at who decides how much workers should be compensated – the platform, the customer or the workers themselves. If the platform sets the prices, it limits the possibilities for workers to decide their own wages, which could be considered paradoxical in the many cases where platforms claim that workers are self-employed. If the compensation is a fixed hourly fee, workers can be expected to receive more

predictability when looking for and doing jobs. However, this could also potentially affect the motivation for doing certain jobs, as some jobs could be expected to deserve higher compensations than others.

If payments are conducted in a piece rate fashion, they could either be set by the platform, as Uber does through its algorithmic pricing (Chen & Sheldon, 2015), or set by the contractor or worker. If the platform sets the price, there is little room for negotiation and competition. This competition could include both contractors offering higher compensation for jobs to attract worker, but also lead to workers being forced to lower their demands for compensation to outcompete other workers. Again we can refer to the concept of marketplace bargaining power, to emphasise that some workers would be better positioned to make demands than others.

Third and last, we must look at where the payments are conducted, meaning if payments are conducted on the platform or outside of it. If payments are conducted on the platform, then it can easily extract its surplus directly from the transactions. If payments are conducted outside of the platform, then the platform will seek to utilize other ways of extracting a surplus from the transaction, charging workers and buyers in other ways.

In line with this, we can formulate the following working hypothesis: Finn Småjobber will seek to control payments between workers and customers, in order to extract a surplus from the transactions.

3.3.7 Risk and flexibility

One of the preconditions for the emergence of the gig economy and labour platforms are what Woodcock labels the “desire for flexibility for/from workers” (Woodcock, 2019). By this he identifies that both workers and platforms are pushing for flexibility. The platform seeks a highly flexible workforce, in order to scale up their workforce on demand while reducing staffing costs. Many workers on the other hand, are seeking more flexibility than what traditional employment offers, among other things through more flexible working hours, being able to combine it with other jobs or desires. Flexibility for workers and platforms are seemingly both complementary and antagonistic; what is flexible for one of them, might reduce the flexibility of the other.

As already pointed out, platforms are based on outsourcing what has previously been part of traditional non-platform firms. For instance, Airbnb has challenged the traditional hotel industry by outsourcing the accommodation to private third parties. This form of outsourcing means that risk and flexibility is being redistributed and rearranged, effectively outsourced to workers (Ravenelle, 2019, p. 152). When studying platforms, it is therefore important to critically examine how risk and flexibility is distributed between the platform, worker and customer. This point is of course closely linked to the discussion of the status of workers, as non-standard forms of employment shifts more of the risk onto workers.

The labour platforms themselves often highlight the individual freedom that platform labour gives to workers, who can decide when they want work and what they want to do - no boss bossing them around. They are, in this sense, free and flexible. At the same time, they also have to carry more of the risks that come with this flexibility. As argued by Jordhus-Lier, “flexibility, risk and fragmentation represent different aspects of the same phenomenon” (Jordhus-Lier, 2017, p. 8). Accordingly, increased flexibility also means increased fragmentation and risk. It is thus crucial to examine how risk and flexibility is being distributed between the parties on the platform.

To illustrate this, we can look at two aspects of this flexibility/risk-duality: income insecurity and lack of insurance (Drahokoupil & Piasna, 2017, p. 338). The freedom to work how and when you want, also increases income insecurity, as a result of unregular working hours and fluctuating income. As workers, more or less voluntarily, are “freelancing” and “contracting” on platforms, they do not have the same forms of insurances that often comes with traditional forms of standard employment – it is unclear who bears the HSE-responsibility (Alsos et al., 2017, p. 47). How are workers affected by this increased income uncertainty, and loss of traditional security?

In line with this theory, we can outline three working hypotheses concerning risk and flexibility: (1) Finn Småjobber will frame it as a flexible option for workers, offering flexibility to workers in respect to working hours and which jobs they would like to do. However, based on the hyper-outsourced model of platforms, (2) the platform can be expected to outsource as much of the risk involved with the work as possible, shifting the risk onto workers and contractors. This in turn puts workers in a dual position: they are flexible to work when and how they want, but

bare a greater part of the risk involved with the work. Lastly, (3) risk and flexibility will also be affected by marketplace bargaining power, where some workers will benefit more from this flexibility than others.

4. Qualitative research and methods

Before discussing my research design, methods and analysis tactics, it is appropriate to briefly reiterate my research question, as it has been at the core of my methodological choices: *How did Finn Småjobber seek to control the labour process? How did workers experience working through the platform?* In the following chapter, I will discuss the choices I have made in order to be best equipped to answer these questions. I start off by discussing my choice of case study as an appropriate research method. I then outline the steps I have taken in order to ensure rigour, and how I have incorporated ethical principles in my research. Lastly, I give an account of how I have used interviews and digital archiving tools to collect data, and what tactics and tools I have used in order to code and analyse the data.

4.1 Doing qualitative research and case studies

A challenge in all research is the shift from mere observations to actual data and analysis. What is it that makes it *science*? The most obvious answer is through the use of scientific methods. Ragin and Amoroso argue that qualitative research methods are especially well suited for “giving voice, interpreting culturally or historically significant phenomena, and advancing theory” (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, p. 113). This aligns well with the aims of my paper: I seek to contribute to advance theory on platform labour, specifically Finn Småjobber in a Norwegian context; get a greater understanding of these forms of labour as a cultural and social phenomena; and give voice to the workers who experience platform labour first hand.

In order to answer my research questions, I have chosen to conduct a single case study. Case study research rests on the philosophical understanding that the study of human behaviour and experience can never be fully grasped by predictive and universal theories. Hence, the value of case study research is that it offers “concrete, context-dependent” knowledge about how the real world is lived and experienced (Flyvbjerg, 2006). According to Baxter, case study research “involves the study of a single instance or small number of instances of a phenomenon in order to explore in-depth nuances of the phenomenon and the contextual influences on and explanations of that phenomenon” (Baxter, 2010, p. 81).

As emphasised by Castree, case study research in human geography serves the purpose of showing how geography underpins phenomena, showing how the world is “persistently diverse” and at the same time that “diversity arises out of multiscale relations such that it does

not emerge *sui generis*” (Castree, 2005, p. 541) . In other words, geographic case study research is a way of studying how general processes – platform labour – is affected by, and affects the space in which it operates – Finn Småjobber. As I have previously argued, in line with Dodge and Kitchin’s (2005) ontogenetic view of space, platforms should be analysed as distinct code/spaces. This means that they should be analysed both in relation to what they seek to be – as in, what they have been constructed to be by different actors – and how they are utilised by its users, as the ontogenetic view of space considers space as something that comes to be through our interaction with it.

In my case study, I have sought to illustrate both the diversity of platform labour, by offering an in-depth description of *one* case of platform labour, and also contribute to research on platform labour in general: the proliferation of platforms means that the study of one case of platform labour, if conducted in a rigorous manner, will contribute not only to illuminate this particular case, but also illuminate more general patterns common among several platforms – or code/spaces if you will. If done properly, case studies will illuminate both the case itself and also the phenomena of which the case is a case of – “case studies scrutinise one or more phenomena *in context*” (Castree 2005, p. 542, my emphasis). In my thesis, I have conducted a qualitative case study of a single Norwegian labour platform, in order to give an in-depth understanding of that platform. The platform is in turn part of a mosaic of different labour platforms. To understand platform labour in Norway, it is important to also understand how different platforms operate, and along what dimensions they may differ. As outlined in the theory chapters, different platforms operate in different ways with different purposes. In order to understand platform labour as a broader phenomenon, it is also important to understand how individual platforms – or cases if you will – apply similar and different tactics, and with what consequences.

In order to make such generalisations beyond the single case, it is important to increase the transferability of the study. I have sought to do this by building an analytical framework rooted in existing theory and research on platform labour. By using an analytical framework, I have been able to situate my case, and guide my choices of methods and data collection. As pointed out by Ragin and Amoroso, “[T]he more explicit a researcher’s initial ideas (or “analytic frame”), the clearer the guidance they offer about what should be studied and what can safely be ignored in the infinity of information that every case and every situation presents” (Ragin & Amoroso, 2011, p. 3). By structuring an analytical framework, rooted in existing theory on

platform labour, I offer a clear focus in my study, while increasing the transferability of my findings. This will be further discussed in the following section.

4.2 Rigour and analytic generalisation

Regardless of if one is conducting qualitative or quantitative research, a rigorous research process is essential for ensuring both the quality and reliability of one's research and findings. When conducting qualitative research, quality assurance and rigour differs some-what from quantitative research. In qualitative research, we risk the potential critique of having a too small number of units/cases to generalise and validate our findings. This critique however often rests on a narrow perspective on generalisation. As stated by Bailey, "within qualitative research, validity should not be tied to statistical inferences, such as the idea that one can only make data-construct links (from description to theory) when one is dealing with a large and representative dataset" (Bailey et al., 1999, p. 172).

In qualitative case studies, we are not seeking statistical generalization, but rather analytic generalisation. This is according to Baxter obtained through "carefully selecting cases" and "creating useful theory that is neither too abstract nor too case-specific" (Baxter, 2010, p. 94). My analytical framework has been constructed from existing theory on platform labour, which assures that it is not too case specific. Through an extensive analysis of my case, I use the general framework to shed light on my specific case. This entails that the analysis is not decoupled from existing research, but rather builds on it, so that it is possible to say something general from studying my specific case. Relating back to the points made on reflexivity, using this analytical framework is also a step towards ensuring limiting potential bias, by allowing readers to see findings in relation to theory.

Analytic generalisation relates to the concept of transferability: how can we make general claims from case studies, which are inherently context sensitive? This can be accounted for in several ways. Firstly, through the use of common concepts, as has been accounted for in the discussion on my analytical framework. Secondly, it is important to provide sufficient context to the case, so that it is clear what is particular to the case in question, and what it has in common with similar cases. In my analysis, I give a systematic account of how the platform operated along the seven dimensions of my analytical framework. This way I both highlight what is case

specific, and also put it into the more general context of platform labour, providing a detailed account of how it operated in comparison to the more general view of platform labour.

One of the ways in which to ensure credibility in case studies, is through triangulation. Patton (2015) argues that triangulation should not be misunderstood as a way of merely demonstrating that different data sources yield the same result. Triangulation is rather a method to test for consistency: “finding such inconsistencies ought not be viewed as weakening the credibility of results but, rather, as offering opportunities for deeper insights into the relationship between inquiry approach and the phenomenon under study” (Patton, 2015, p. 479). In my analysis, I have used so-called *source triangulation*, referring to “the use of more than one report from a data set to corroborate a construct” (Baxter & Eyles, 1997, p. 514). In my analysis, findings in each of the interviews have been read in light of other findings: does X represent a general pattern or an individual experience? An example of this is in the discussion of underbidding on the platform(see section 7.4.2). Based on only one interview it would have been difficult to conclude that underbidding was a general phenomenon on the platform. When I in later interviews got similar information, this increased the basis to conclude that underbidding was a general phenomenon that occurred on the platform.

As the platform shut down during my work with this thesis, I had to rethink my methods. My initial plan was to conduct an ethnographic data collection, working through the platform myself, to get a first-hand embodied experience of what it felt like working on the platform. This was then supposed to be supplemented by a few interviews with workers. When the platform then stated it was shutting down, I decided to collect this perspective through interviewing workers, to get that embodied experience from them. In retrospect, I still think that my study could have benefitted from some form of ethnographic data collection, to get a deeper sense of the mechanisms operating on the platform before conducting interviews with workers. This could in turn have given an even better understanding of what was relevant to discuss in the worker interviews.

4.3 Reflexivity

One of the essential steps towards ensuring a rigorous research process is through reflexivity. Feminist geographer Kim England defines reflexivity as “self-critical analytical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious scrutiny of the self as a researcher” (England, 1994, p. 82). It is important to be critically reflexive not only at the end of our research, but throughout the entire process. Reflexivity should be applied to each stage of the research, “from the early planning and establishing of relations in the field, to the writing-up of conclusions” (Bailey et al., 1999, p. 172).

Being critically reflexive is thus “the most appropriate strategy for dealing with issues of subjectivity and intersubjectivity” (Dowling, 2010, p. 35): through a constant revision of one’s assumptions and findings, the researcher can critically examine how the results could possibly be coloured by the researchers own assumptions. “Reflexivity provides a way of validating the presentation of findings: it rests on the researcher’s self-understanding of the research process” (Bailey et al., 1999, p. 172). Analysis and interpretation will reflect the choices made throughout the research process (Saldaña, 2009). Hence, one of the most important ways of assuring the quality of the findings in one’s research, is through a continued critical reflection on ones assumptions, choices and findings.

As an example, during my research project, I have realised that I had some underlying assumptions about the field that lacked nuance. After my literature review, before my data collection, I expected that the workers I would interview, would express feelings of exploitation from the platform, and that workers on platforms were in difficult situations in their personal life. During my interviews, this picture quickly became more nuanced, as workers expressed a more flexible and free relationship to the platform. This got me to reflect on the positionality of individual workers, and made me more aware of the importance of keeping in mind the circumstances of individual workers: different workers will have different experiences. This new realisation was incorporated in the analysis through adding marketplace bargaining power (see section 3.3.1). In section 4.4 I reflect more on my sample and how it potentially could be limited in scope, and I have also included reflections around how my findings would differ between workers in different situations in sections 6. and 7.

It is also inevitable that researchers affect the study that they conduct. Every choice made – from topic, to research design and data collection, each choice we make is to some extent coloured by the researchers perspectives. Among other things, I have discussed and gotten feedback from both my supervisors and others that are researching the field, in order to assure that my analytical framework has been of the necessary quality and context. When constructing my interview guide, I have made sure to phrase the questions and topics as open as possible, to avoid leading the informants to conclusions that they might think suited my research.

4.4 Conducting ethical research

An essential part of conducting any form of research is applying ethical principles and guidelines throughout the research process. Researchers have an obligation to informants, the field that is being studied and the research community, to conduct research in an ethical and responsible manner. Dowling (2010, p. 36) identifies at least three key reasons for why researchers must reflect on the ethics of their research: First, to protect the rights of people involved and affected by our research; second, to ensure a good climate for social enquiry; and third, in order to ensure trust in the universities as institutions. In the following section I will discuss the steps I have taken to ensure that my work has been responsible and in line with ethics of research.

As pointed out by Dowling, “[C]ollecting and interpreting social information involves personal interactions”(2010, p. 26). When conducting social research we are interacting with other people, drawing on their knowledge and trust. Being critically reflexive throughout the research process is a way of ensuring that we are honouring the trust given to us by informants, the research community and society in general.

An essential part of research ethics is our responsibility towards our informants. When informants participate in our research, we are obliged to make sure that any personal or sensitive information is stored in a safe place (Dowling, 2010). We must also be aware of the fact what consent entails in research. It is the researchers responsibility to make sure that the informant is aware of what s/he is consenting to participate in. In other words, the researcher must strive for clarifying what participation entails (Dowling, 2010).

One of the situations in which I faced an ethical dilemma came during my recruitment phase. I got in contact with multiple people that had tried working through Finn Småjobber. Some also gave brief descriptions of how they had found using it. When I then inquired about an interview, most were reluctant to talk. In these situations I was put in an ethical dilemma: I knew my study would benefit from more informants, and especially some of the perspectives that these workers had, but at the same time I was hesitant to push people to participate. In these instances I ended up thanking them for their time, adding that they could get back to me if they changed their mind.

I have ensured the privacy of my participants by only storing the necessary minimum of sensitive information, and all sensitive information have been securely kept on UiOs protected servers. I have made sure to anonymise my informants in my own documents and in the final thesis. Informants have been informed of the study and the implications of participation (see consent form in Appendix A). A head of my data collection, my project has also been registered and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

4.5 Interviews

Interviews are social encounters (Valentine, 2005), and each informant and interview setting is different. In my research, I have interviewed both representatives from Finn Småjobber, as well as people that have used the platform to do jobs – workers. As already discussed, I argue that in order to understand how workers experience using the platform, you need to have a good understanding of the platform, and vice versa. In line with the basic understanding from labour process theory, it is important to understand the tactics that the platform use to control the labour process, and how this affects workers.

In the capital-labour-dichotomy, there is an inherent understanding of an asymmetry of power: Capital controls and coordinates the labour process, and through this has power over labour. Does this mean that capital is powerful, and labour is powerless? As Smith (2006) argues, the traditional view of power and elites needs critical reflexion and scrutiny. A post structural perspective on power acknowledges that power is not static, but relational and fluid: it is not possessed by actors, but acting in relations. This is an important point to keep in mind when conducting interviews. In my research, I have conducted interviews with both capital (the

platform) and labour (people working through the platform). An overly structural view of power could potentially overemphasise the power of the platform.

The interviews were all semi-structured, with an interview guide to help guide the conversation. using an interview guide, I have been able to ensure that the same topics and questions have been given to each of the informants, which in turn allows for cross referencing experiences between different informants as part of my source triangulation (Patton, 2002, p. 342). I deliberately chose a semi-structured approach, as semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in the conversation (Dunn, 2010, p. 102). I wanted the conversation to be fairly open and, so that the informants could reflect freely. When outlining my interview guide, and during the interviews, I have been aware of the potential interview effect, where the researcher could be leading the informants into thoughts and conclusions that are not necessarily their own (Patton, 2015, p. 643). I have tried to account for this when constructing my interview guide, deliberately seeking open ended questions and topics and letting the respondents themselves reflect around them. My interview guide was a combination of fully worded sentences and keywords, where the full questions served as opening and transitional questions, while the keywords were there to ensure that they were touched upon by all informants (see interview guide in Appendix B).

4.5.1. Selection of informants

At its most basic, platforms are brokering contact information. As the platforms main role in the labour process is connecting workers with jobs, they apply different strategies to limiting the amount of information visible on the platforms, only disclosing contact information as part of a transaction. This also means that their strategy is to disclose as little information as possible until a transaction has been made. If, for instance, Uber were to put up the phone numbers of drivers or passengers prior to the transaction in the platform, the parties could have simply bypassed the platform and dealt directly with each other, thus lowering costs by avoiding fees to the platform. In this economy, information and data is the currency, and controlling the flow of it is essential. This information black box has been challenging in my research process, as it has made it difficult to recruit informants. The fact that the platform also shut down just before I was starting my data collection, meant that I could no longer use the platform itself as a way

of reaching informants, a strategy that has been successfully used in studies of Uber in Norway (Finstad, 2017; Oppegard, 2018).

When recruiting worker informants I have had to use several different recruitment strategies. The most effective has been the snowballing tactic. As Valentine points out, the strength of snowballing is that it “helps researchers to overcome one of the main obstacles to recruiting interviewees, gaining their trust” (Valentine, 2005, p. 117). By being put in contact with potential informants through people they are familiar with, I have been able to get access and trust. I have also recruited informants through Facebook groups that explicitly connect parties in small job transactions. An interesting side note regarding these Facebook groups, is that they use the same definitions of small jobs as the traditional labour platforms that are distributing small jobs. Recruiting informants through these groups however proved to be challenging. Most of the people I contacted did not respond, and out of those that responded, most did not want to participate, despite several of them stating that they had tried doing jobs for Finn Småjobber. Several of the informants did not want to participate due not being comfortable speaking English or Norwegian.

In total, I have conducted interviews with six workers, two women and four men. Their ages ranged between early 20 and up to 40 years. All of the informants have a Norwegian background. One potential weakness of the sample of workers, is that it is fairly homogeneous. Although I have talked to both male and female informants, they all have a Norwegian background. When I recruited worker informants through the Facebook groups, I observed that a large portion of the workers that showed interest in jobs seemed to be foreigners. In other words, it is highly likely that there was a fair share of workers with a non-Norwegian background working through the platform. Unfortunately, both due to time constraints and a challenging recruitment process I was not able to recruit more informants. My analysis would have benefitted from having a wider range of informants. That could potentially have given insights and experiences that are not covered in the sample of this thesis.

How representative are my worker informants? In a Danish study, Ilsøe and Madsen (2017) found that platform workers were predominantly young, temporarily employed, with low income and low education, and people with a non-Danish ethnic background. It is reasonable to assume that the situation in Norway is similar. For instance, Oppegard (2018) found that Uber Black drivers were dominated by people with ethnic backgrounds that struggled to find

other jobs. In other words, when analysing the platform and interviews, it is important to be sensitive to the fact that workers on these platforms could be even more dominated by people on the fringes of the labour market, than the ones I have interviewed. This potential weakness is accounted for by triangulation with other studies of platform labour in Norway and the Nordic countries. Finstad (2017), Alsos et al. (2017), Oppegaard (2018) and Jesnes and Oppegaard (2020) have particularly served as valuable sources of triangulation and cross referencing.

When recruiting informants from Finn Småjobber, I contacted several people at Finn via email, and was eventually referred to one of my informants (Richard), who was working at Finn Småjobber at the time. When making arrangements for the interview, Richard then suggested that Michael also could be part of the interview, as he had insights about how the platform had functioned in the beginning, and how it had developed. Although one should take careful considerations into how informants (seek to) affect the interview and the interview setting, I considered the potential insights from having this extra informant so valuable that I accepted doing a joint interview of the two. In retrospect I can say that this decision has contributed greatly to the thesis, as the knowledge that two informants possessed complemented each other in a valuable way.

Below I have included a table (Table 1) with key information on the workers. I have given them aliases to ensure their privacy, while also making it easier to follow who is saying what when lengthy quotes are being used. The informants are listed chronologically after which interview were conducted first to last. Although I conducted one joint interview with the two representatives from Finn, I have still split them up as separate informants, as they were involved in different periods of the platform, and could give different insights. I have distinguished between them by assigning a number to each of them. I have also chosen to not disclose the informants exact age, but rather put them in categories of age span.

Table 1: List of informants

Informants	Role	Gender	Age	Additional info
“Michael”	Finn representative	Male	35-40	Worked at FS when the platform was launched
“Richard”	Finn representative	Male	30-35	Worked at FS from 2018 until it closed
“Frank”	Worker	Male	25-30	Works in customer relations
“Hans”	Worker	Male	40-45	Nurse
“Nina”	Worker	Female	25-30	Self-employed
“Karen”	Worker	Female	30-35	Freelancer
“George”	Worker	Male	20-25	Freelancer
“Lars”	Worker	Male	20-25	Student

4.5.2. Conducting interviews

Two of the worker interviews were conducted face-to-face in Oslo, whereas the other four were telephone interviews. The interviews were conducted between November 2019 and February 2020, and each of them lasted for about 45-60 minutes. All the interviews had an informal and relaxed atmosphere, and all the informants seemed eager to share from their experiences. This resulted in very interesting conversations. When conducting my interview with Nina, it turned out that she had only used the platform to do a job at one occasion. When we arranged the interview I got the impression that she had used it to a much larger extent. Despite her limited experience with the platform, I have decided to include her in the study.

In addition to the six interviews conducted with workers, I also had a joint interview with two representatives from the Finn Småjobber – Michael and Richard. Michael had been working on the platform in the period when it was launched, while Richard worked there in the last period until it closed down. This interview was conducted November 2019. The interview was conducted in a meeting room in the headquarters of Finn. During the interview, I got a sense that the two informants were eager to speak with me and were interested in the project. To get a sense of the difference between theory and practice – the intentions of the platform versus the experience of using it – this interview had many of the same questions and topics as the interviews with the workers. This was a deliberate choice, as I wanted the platform’s own

perspective on how it worked: What was the reason for the platform being set up in this way, what were the strategies behind the platform's design? This information has been used in the part where I analyse the platform itself.

Only two of the interviews (Frank and Hans) were recorded, as most informants preferred not to be recorded. If I had recorded all the interviews I could potentially have done a deeper analysis of the language and phrasing of my informants, and also had the opportunity to be even more engaged in the conversations that I was able to. However, the interviews that were not recorded were transcribed close to verbatim, and I also felt that I was able to follow up on interesting points that came up. Using my interview guide, I also had the opportunity of crossing out themes as they came up, and making sure I managed to cover the themes I intended to. Immediately after each interview I reviewed my notes and elaborated on important aspects of what had been said through writing memos. I have also included a translated version of my interview guide in the appendix, to increase the transparency of my data collection process.

All of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and as a result all quotes that are used in this thesis have been translated from Norwegian to English, based on transcriptions and notes taken during the interviews. I have strived to maintain the verbal style of the quotes, and have also to the best of my abilities made sure not to add any meaning to the quotes that was not there initially.

4.6 Triangulation through online archiving tools

When we analyse labour platforms it is necessary to critically examine how the platform has been designed with a specific purpose. In addition to interviewing representatives from Finn Småjobber, I have used online archiving tools to access the platform, in order to study how the platform portrayed itself and the service it provided.

I examine how the platform sought to control the labour process, through deliberate choices. Because I understand code/spaces as virtual action spaces with purposeful limitations, I have chosen to research these limitations. In the same way as the physical environment is designed for humans to interact with it in certain ways, so is the platform. The physical infrastructure of real space, such as roads, bridges, doors and fences, is replicated in virtual space through user

interfaces, links and other functions that guide our use of it. Infrastructure does however not fully control its use. In the same way as you can jump over a fence, you can find ways of using platforms that are perhaps not initially intended. This final point is examined in the interviews with workers, where we look at how the initial platform action space is utilized by the workers.

One of the main challenges of analysing virtual space, is that it is constantly changing. Web pages are constantly being updated and rearranged, which then makes an analysis tricky. They are moving targets. After Finn Småjobber shut down, the landing page <https://www.finn.no/smajobber/> has been changed so that the initial interface of my interest has disappeared: the virtual space has been recoded. This has provided a challenge, as I have sought to analyse the action space of the platform that the workers encountered.

I have resolved this issue by using the online internet archive Wayback Machine. Where one could previously rely on printed newspapers, photographs etc., tools such as Wayback Machine helps store and capture important information that would otherwise be lost. Through the use of Wayback Machine, I have been able to access older versions of the Finn Småjobber pages. In total, the page has been saved 748 times between the 29th of June 2013 and 22th of February 2020. Each save provides a “snapshot” of the web page at a given point in time. Through this archive, it is possible to access parts of the site that have now been taken down. By accessing these versions of the site, I have been able to triangulate and elaborate on information that has been disclosed by my informants. I have referenced snapshots I have used throughout the thesis, and also included them in the list of references.

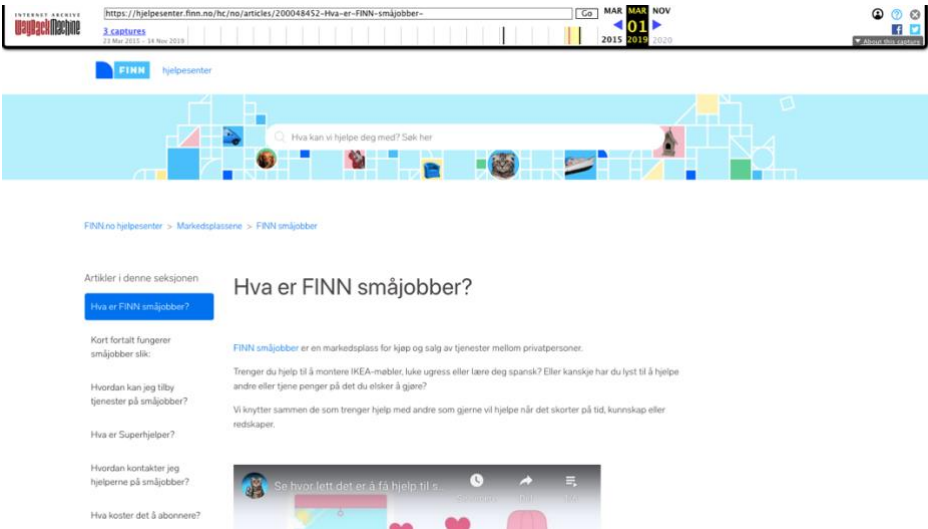


Figure 3: Example of use of Wayback Machine

Although Wayback Machine offers the possibility of accessing these sites, the snapshots that Wayback Machine provides is only partly functional. By that I mean that one can browse parts of the site through the snapshots, but with certain limitations. Through the snapshots I have been able to get an overview of the terms for using the site, the platform that workers browsed looking for jobs, and how the posted jobs looked like for workers. I could however not access the parts of the platform where workers opened up a profile, or where they engaged with and communicated with job owners. In other words, the information I have extracted from these snapshots have predominantly served as points of triangulation and quality control.

4.7 Coding and analysis

As outlined in the theory chapter, this paper looks at seven main aspects of platforms. These have been deduced from existing theory on platform labour, and have guided my work throughout my research process. Both in analysing the platform action space and the interviews, I have used these dimensions as themes in a deductively designed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This has been supplemented by inductive coding throughout the research process, where I have added themes and codes as the research has progressed. Coding the data is according to Saldaña not a precise science, it's primarily "an interpretive act" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 4). Thus coding is part of the process of interpretation and analysis. More specifically, it is "the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 4).

Coding is a heuristic: it is a way of organising, linking and understanding information. Through a systematic coding process, we are simultaneously also analysing our findings, which enable us to identify similarities and patterns that "actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connection" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 8). I have coded my data through the qualitative analysis software Nvivo, which is a useful tool for systematic exploration of qualitative data (Welsh, 2002). As qualitative data is often more complex and nuanced than quantitative data, NVIVO enables qualitative researchers to structure and manage their data, and as a result contribute to making the analysis of the data more systematic and rigorous.

When analysing my data I have combined a deductive and inductive coding approach. My initially identified dimensions of platform labour have served as my deductive starting point in

the first round of coding. My interviews have first been coded according to these broad themes outlined in the analytical framework. Secondly, I have also applied an inductive approach, where I have built codes and themes directly from the interviews. Most of these codes have then served as sub-codes to my deductive codes. Through this approach, my deductive codes have guided my coding, while also being revised and expanded from my inductive codes. As an example, my deductive code “Risk and Flexibility” (from section 3.3.7), have been expanded with inductive codes such as “freedom” and “inequality”.

I have purposefully structured my analysis into two phases in line with my two research questions. First, I focus on the platform action space and analyse it through the seven dimensions previously outlined. This analysis is based on data from interviewing representatives from Finn Småjobber, and revised and expanded based on findings from exploring the platform through Wayback Machine. This first analysis phase serves as the starting point for analysing and understanding the experience of workers, where I put these findings into context, looking at how the platform “works” for its workers. These are not two distinct, separate analyses, but rather a joint systematic analysis: first we get an understanding of the platform itself, and then in relation to workers. Through the perspectives of the workers, we can examine and reassess the findings of the preliminary platform analysis. In relation to the ontogenetic view of space, the virtual space of platforms is made through interaction between the platform and its users. In other words, an ontogenetic view of space renders an analysis of labour platforms irrelevant without the perspectives of the workers that use and experience it.

5. Finn Småjobber and the Norwegian platform economy

In the following chapter I will contextualise Finn Småjobber. First, I provide an overview of the prevalence of platform labour in Norway. Secondly, I give an overview of the Finn marketplace and the launch of Finn Småjobber.

5.1 The context: The Norwegian labour platform landscape

In a Norwegian context, if you tell someone you are doing “platform work”, most people will assume you are working in the petroleum sector, as the word “platform” most often is used to refer to oil rigs. Being a dominant industry both economically and historically this is natural. But what is the situation like for *digital* platform labour in Norway? As of yet, the research on the Norwegian labour platforms is limited, which is natural when considering this is an emergent phenomenon that has not yet expanded in the same way as in other countries (for instance the US).

In a study from 2017, Berg And Kjørstad examined the sharing economy in Norway from the perspectives of workers and customers. Among other things, they found that from 2015 to 2017, the share of the population between 18 and 60 years that had bought services through so-called sharing economy platforms had increased from 7 to 32 percent. The study examined not only labour platforms, but also included platforms such as Airbnb. The platforms most people had used was Airbnb (15 percent nationwide), followed by Uber (12 percent) and Finn Småjobber (6 percent) (Berg & Kjørstad, 2017).

Although Uber since then has reduced its operations in Norway to only include the limousine service Uber Black, it is reasonable to assume that the overall numbers have kept increasing. This suggests that a cultural shift in consumer habits has taken place: Using different forms of platforms to buy services has come to stay in Norway. In a 2016 report, Pedersen et al. estimated that different forms of sharing economy platforms in total had a turnover of 500 million NOK in Norway. They also estimated that the Norwegian platform economy could potentially have an annual growth of 60 percent, resulting in a yearly revenue of 42 billion NOK in 2045 (Pedersen et al., 2016).

This rising economical phenomenon also attracted the interest of Norwegian authorities. In 2016 the government at the time sat up a “Committee on the Sharing Economy”, that was given the task of “considering opportunities and challenges that the emergence of the sharing economy raises” (Delingsøkonomiutvalget, 2015). The committee delivered a report to the Norwegian Ministry of Finance in February 2017. The report stated that work distributed between private parties did not represent something new, but did also argue that the effectiveness of mediation that new these forms of transactions offered could potentially enable them to expand (Delingsøkonomiutvalget, 2017, p. 10).

Moreover, the report discussed the potential effects this form of work could have on worker rights’ and security. A majority of the representatives in the committee concluded that the current Working Environment Act was flexible enough to resolve potential conflicts that might occur, and that there was no need to suggest changes in terms of employment relations. The report also optimistically stated that technological advances had previously benefitted highly educated people the most, and that now it could also potentially bring more flexibility and opportunities for lower skilled workers (Delingsøkonomiutvalget, 2017, p. 11)

In the report “When the boss is an app”, researchers at the Fafo Research Foundation gave an overview of the Norwegian labour platform landscape (Alsos et al., 2017). They concluded that platform labour as of now is a relatively small phenomenon in Norway. In the report, they identified between 30 and 40 labour platforms. These numbers are from 2016 and 2017, and several platforms have both popped up and disappeared since then. The report also found that the services that are being distributed on Norwegian labour platforms are predominantly manual labour with low skill requirements (Alsos et al., 2017, p. 52).

According to their survey, approximately 1 percent of the Norwegian population between 18 and 65 years had used a labour platform to do work in the last twelve months, equivalent to 30.000 workers. 45 percent of the respondents reported that they had done platform work one time or less, while 30 percent reported that they had once a week or more. In other words, how often workers used the labour platforms varied significantly. The Fafo-report also identified that the majority of workers were connected to three dominating labour platforms: Finn Småjobber, Uber and Foodora. In other words, at the time, Norwegian labour platforms seemed to have a small but stable group of workers, predominantly utilizing three dominating platforms. Importantly, Finn Småjobber is now closed, and Uber as limited its operations in Norway to

only include the limousine service Uber Black (Oppegard, 2018). In other words, although these numbers are valid for my case, as it illustrates its scope at the time it was active, updated numbers on the scope labour platforms in Norway is needed.

The labour platform situation is similar in the Nordic countries. In a report on platform labour in the Nordic countries, Jesnes and Oppegard point out that while these platforms have a potential to offer innovating and flexible new business models, they also “challenge the traditional employment relationship upon which the Nordic model of work and welfare is based” (2020, p. 11). The Nordic countries have historically been characterized by a well organized labour market, dominated by collective bargaining, standard, full-time employment relations and welfare benefits closely linked to employment status. The labour platforms’ characteristic use of self-employment and outsourcing of risk and responsibility to workers, challenges this. This shift towards self-employment, could also have implications for the collectively organized labour markets in the Nordic countries (Dølvik & Jesnes, 2018). As of yet, platform labour in the Nordic countries is dominated by geographically tethered, low skill work – the proliferation of high skill platform labour is still very limited (Jesnes & Oppegard, 2020).

In sum, platform labour is as of yet a marginal phenomenon both in Norway and in the Nordic countries. Still, as discussed in the previous sections, it is challenging the Nordic labour model. As Jamie Woodcock argues, despite the fact that the quantitative impact of the gig economy is still small, “it has the potential to make a huge qualitative change in how work will be organized in the future” (Woodcock, 2019). There has for instance been controversies in Norway around the labour platform Staffers, that offers flexible workers to bars and restaurants through an app, being critiqued of effectively “operating as a labour market intermediary without employees” (Lønnå, 2019). This illustrates how aspects of platform labour are already affecting the traditional labour market. Thus, an analysis of platform labour is also an analysis of new ways to organise labour, that might impact the Norwegian labour market as a whole.

5.2 The case: Finn Småjobber – “The market of opportunities”

Finn.no is Norway’s leading online marketplace. It is owned by the multinational business group Schibsted, which is the biggest owner of newspapers and online marketplaces in the

Nordic countries. In addition to Finn.no, Schibsted owns similar Nordic marketplaces such as Swedish *Blocket* and Finnish *Tori*. Schibsted also owns several of the biggest Scandinavian news outlets, including VG, Aftenposten and Aftonbladet. The Finn.no marketplace focuses largely on second hand consumer goods, housing and job advertisements, branding themselves as “the market of opportunities”.

In December 2013 Finn.no launched a new service called Finn Småjobber, “Småjobber” directly translating to “small jobs”. According to a press release, Finn Småjobber was a “new marketplace for everyone that wants to offer or perform private services” (Finn.no, 2014). The service sought to “systematise” a marketplace for jobs that had previously been advertised through “flyers on lamp posts, in newspaper ads or through friends and family” (Ibid). The press release mentioned students, free lancers, retirees and unemployed as groups that could be interested in doing jobs through the platform.

Labour platforms, as previously noted, most often do not create new markets, but rather tap into and rearrange existing markets. In this case, Finn Småjobber tapped into the “small job market”, which was at the time unorganized and complex for both workers and clients. Labour platforms generally cut transaction costs, by making it both faster and cheaper for two parties to connect and make transactions. This new labour platform sought to cut these transaction costs on small jobs, by providing a platform that made it easier for buyers and sellers to connect.

The two informants from Finn Småjobber – Michael and Richard – worked on the platform at different periods. Michael was there when the platform was launched, and Richard worked there during the last year of the platform’s existence. Michael said:

Michael: *“The sharing economy was booming at the time, and Schibsted wanted to explore new markets. Finn has always focused on helping private people, both through B2C [business-to-customer] and C2C [customer-to-customer] services. Finn Småjobber fit well with the Finn.no portfolio: We want to be public-minded and help each other out.”*

Concerning the sharing economy in general, he added:

Michael: *“[I]t was booming at the time, you know California, start-ups. There was a lot of funding going around. Internationally there were a lot of actors that were investing in this. There were different actors, some were doing C2C and others B2C. Our goal*

was to become the best service in Norway for private people helping other private people. We wanted to be the preferred platform. There were some other smaller actors [in Norway] at the time, so our aim was to become the preferred one.”

When asked to define what Finn Småjobber was, Richard answered:

Richard: “It was a service where private people could post small jobs that they wanted to get done in their home or cabin. And where other private people could see what jobs were posted and show interest in doing the job. A service where people helped people - private people helped private people.”

Two important points should be emphasised here. Firstly, consistently throughout our interview, Michael and Richard referred to the workers as “helpers”. This was also echoed on the communication on the platform itself, where they referred to workers as “helpers” and customers as “job owners”. On the platform, they also referred to Småjobber as a “marketplace for buying and selling services between private parties” (Finn.no, 2019c). Throughout the rest of this thesis I will predominantly use the label *workers* to describe helpers, and *job owners* to describe those that posted jobs. The label *helper* only be used a few times for illustrative purposes, as well as in quotes from interviews and text on Finn Småjobbers own webpages.

The second point concerns the use of the term “private people” and similar phrases. The terms of use on the Finn Småjobber explicitly referred to the Norwegian tax regulations for small jobs and services: According to the regulations you are allowed to pay someone up to 6000 NOK to conduct work in your own home or cabin, without the worker or employer having to pay taxes from it. The conditions are that the agreement is made between the buyer and the seller directly (as private parties), and that the work is conducted in, or in close proximity to the home, cabin or car. The payment must be done as a private person, and the person conducting the work cannot do it as part of his own business (Skatteetaten, 2019).

The aim of these regulations according to the Norwegian Tax Administration is to give a “simplification for employers”, and not necessarily for the contractors to “get a tax-free income” (Ibid). In continuation of this, the responsibility is firmly placed on the workers themselves to make sure that they are not crossing the line between conducting small jobs and being a private business. It is explicitly stated that you cannot be employed within the same field of work as the small jobs you take. An interesting point to note here, is that the one-time

limit on what you could make from one “small job” was raised at the start of 2014, from 4000 NOK to 6000 NOK. This was announced shortly before Finn.no publicly launched Finn Småjobber (Njarga, 2013). The fact that these financial limits were raised could be seen as a regulatory shift that benefitted this particular form of labour. Another change in legislations worth mentioning was announced in 2015, when the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation made changes in the needs for building permits. From 1st of July 2015 you were allowed to do larger construction projects on your home without the need for a permit from your local municipality (Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet, 2015). As emphasised by Woodcock, states both limit and facilitate the growth of platform labour through regulations (Woodcock, 2019). These two changes in regulations could be seen as the state facilitating the market and profitability for small job platforms in Norway.

When I pointed out to Richard and Michael that it seemed like several other Norwegian labour platforms that distributed small jobs – such as Finn Småjobbers competitor platform Luado – used an almost identical text on their pages, referring to the Norwegian Tax Administration’s regulation on small tasks and services, Richard responded: “*Yeah, it’s kind of the gold standard*”. Michael added:

Michael: “*The first texts about small jobs that the authorities used, was actually from Finn Småjobber. [...] We were early in the business. There were somebody here [at Finn] that pointed to the new regulations and said ‘do you see that? I’ve written that!’. We got a lot of exposure for that at the time, it was god for our branding.*”

This is an interesting point, as platforms such as Uber has been known for pushing regulations, and in Norway have sparked a process of taxi market deregulation (Jesnes & Oppegaard, 2020). In this case, the regulations were seemingly not pushed, but rather developed along with the development of Småjobber.

6. The platform action space: Applying the dimensions

In the following sections I will use this thesis' analytical framework on Finn Småjobber, to answer my first research question: *How did Finn Småjobber seek to control the labour process?* Here, I look at the platform-worker relation, the degree of professional specialisation, the barriers of entry for workers, the platform model, its use of techno-normative control, its form of remuneration and the distribution of risk and flexibility on the platform. All of these dimensions will be analysed based on data from the interviews with the representatives from Finn Småjobber – Michael and Richard – and from the use of the digital archiving tool Wayback Machine. This analysis of the platform action space will then serve as the basis for analysing the perspectives of workers in the following chapter, chapter seven.

6.1 Platform-worker relation

In this section I will discuss the formal relationship between the platform and workers on Finn Småjobber. As stated earlier, one of the most important discussions of platform labour, relates to the relationship between the platform and its workers (Hotvedt, 2018). This relationship could be discussed in terms of employment status and/or in terms of the experienced relationship between the parties on the platform.

What relationship did the platform establish between themselves and the workers? On Finn Småjobber, there was no formal employment relationship between the platform and the workers. As emphasised previously, the form of labour that the platform was distributing, was based on the regulations of small jobs and services. These regulations pertain to small jobs conducted in or in close proximity to the home (Skatteetaten, n.d.). In most cases of platform labour, platforms insist upon labelling workers as self-employed or contractors. In this case however, the regulations are in fact stating that you are not allowed to be employed or self-employed within the same profession as the one you are conducting small jobs in (Skatteetaten, 2019). In other words, the traditional formal terms of employed, self-employed or freelancer cannot be applied by the platform, as the regulations prohibit doing this work professionally. Formally you weren't allowed to be a worker, just a "private person" doing a job for someone.

Operating within these regulations, the platform explicitly positioned themselves outside of the transactions, as jobs like these had to be an agreement between two private parties. The representatives from Finn Småjobber confirmed that there was very limited contact between the platform and workers: Richard: *“Not outside of ordinary user feedback, I would say. We arranged ‘helper nights’ and user interviews to hear what people thought of the platform, to make improvements on the platform.”* Michael followed up saying: *“We wanted to have a good relationship with the helpers. We held a lot of user interviews.”* When asked if any improvements had been implemented based on such interviews, Michael answered: *“It was taken into consideration when we assessed potential developments for the platform, user testing and that kind of stuff. Some people got to try new functions.”* In other words, communication between the platform and the workers was limited to “customer feedback”, where the worker’s inputs was used to improve the platform. This illustrates an important point: The platform considered the workers to be users and consumers of services on a marketplace. This bears resemblance to how Uber has sought to frame themselves as “just” a technology company that is offering a digital arena for interaction between users (Oppegard, 2018).

Labour platforms operate within an unclear triangular relationship, between the platform, worker and customer. This simplistic view of a “tripart” relationship needs scrutiny. All three parties have their own interests; the worker seeks an income, the customer seeks someone to do a job, and the platform seeks to extract a surplus from the interaction between workers and customers on the platform.

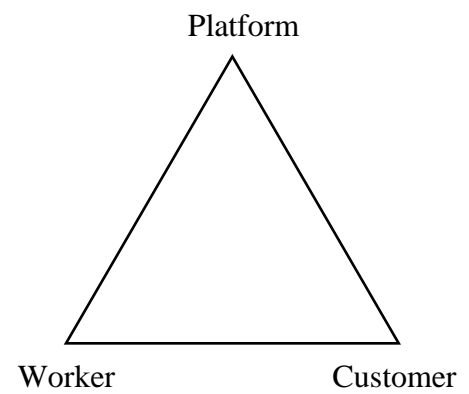


Figure 4: Generalised view of platform relationships

While keeping in mind that both workers and customers are “free” to utilise the platforms to fulfil their own interests, the platform is ultimately setting the rules for how workers and customers can do this. This is what has previously been referred to as the platform’s *secondary agency*: Users are interacting in a code/space that is designed and controlled with a purpose. It can be discussed if the platform, rather than being part of the triangle, incapsulates the transaction, setting the rules and controlling the actions of workers and consumers. The platform could also be viewed as a barrier between workers and customers, where information and interaction has to pass through the platform code/space.

On the platforms webpages, and in my interviews, the workers were referred to as “*helpers*”, and customers were referred to as “*job owners*”. If we return to the discussion of the triangle, I argue that Finn Småjobber could rather be understood as a point of contact between workers and job owners: It was both a bridge and a barrier. They provided a space where workers could browse jobs and connect with job owners, but governed contact information between the parties through information asymmetries, so that users were only able to connect after a transaction had been made. At that point, the users could effectively continue the communication outside of the platform space.

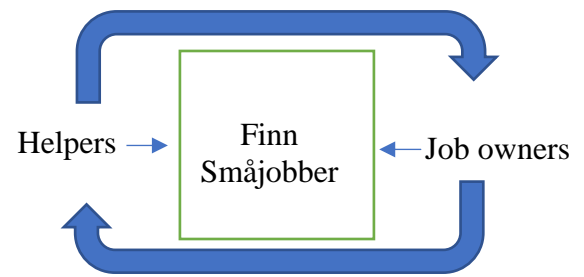


Figure 5: Reimagined platform relationships

If we return to the concept of commodification and decommodification (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2016), it could be argued that the non-existing employment relationship on Finn Småjobber contributed to the commodification of labour. By restructuring and formalizing a new form of “small job” market, Finn Småjobber facilitated labour transactions outside of ordinary employment relations. Although the regulations on small jobs and services are essentially intended to protect organized, formal labour, Finn Småjobber systematising a market of small jobs through platforms could, potentially, move activities such as moving jobs or painting jobs from organized moving businesses and employees, to the small job market. This platform utilization of self-employment can be contrasted to platforms that employ workers. Couriers delivering food for Foodora in Norway are employed by the company, and as a result they have access to unemployment benefits, sick pay and pension, in addition to more predictable working hours and income (Skatteetaten, n.d.). After the couriers signed a collective agreement with Foodora, the platform has started delivering food by car and mopeds. These drivers are not covered by the same rules as the cyclists, as they are only hired as contractors (NTB, 2020).

In the working hypothesis, Finn Småjobber was expected to utilise tactics similar to other labour platforms, by establishing a loose connection between themselves and workers. This proved to be the case, as there was no formal employment relationship between the platform and the workers. However, what was distinctive about Finn Småjobber in this regard, was that the platform operated within regulations of labour that restricted the establishment of an employment relationship, as the transactions had to be arranged directly between two private parties. Unlike other platforms that push for avoiding employing workers, in this case the

platform circumvented potential demands for employment, by referring to concrete regulations that prohibited employment. The Småjobber branch of Finn.no was regarded as a C2C marketplace in the same sense as the second hand section of Finn. For them, there was no difference whether you were buying or selling used items or labour power. Workers worked *through*, not *for* the platform.

6.2 Degree of professional specialisation

What sort of work did the platform distribute? As discussed in section 3.3.2, an important distinction within platform labour concerns the degree of professional specialisation of the labour conducted on the platform. This can be illustrated along two axes; the degree of professional requirements, and the degree of specialisation of the work on platforms. As previously emphasised, this is not only interesting as a distinguishing feature in its own right, but can also be used to understand what sort of marketplace bargaining power workers have on labour platforms more generally.

On Finn Småjobber, the work that was distributed could best be described as different forms of domestic work or chores. Workers could choose between different categories of work, and browse jobs in each category. These categories changed as the platform developed. On 12th October 2017, the categories were transportation; gardening; building and assembling; IT, computers and cell phones; cleaning and housework; and repairs and maintenance (Finn.no, 2017b). As of 1st January 2019, the categories had been changed to four main categories: transportation, cleaning, gardening, and building and reparations (Finn.no, 2019a). Each of them could be browsed by different subcategories. As we can see the categories were all types of what could traditionally be characterised as domestic work. This form of work has traditionally been low skill and with low pay. As discussed in the previous section, the regulations on small jobs states that you are not allowed to do small jobs professionally. Hence, both formally and in practice, it is fair to label the work as being non-professional.

At the time when Finn Småjobber was still active, the Schibsted corporation had two labour platform services: Finn Småjobber and Mitt Anbud. Mitt Anbud is still active, and is a call for bid, business-to-customer platform, where professional craftsmen compete for jobs posted by private parties (Mittanbud, 2018). The difference in professionalisation can be illustrated by comparing Finn Småjobber and Mitt Anbud. The jobs distributed through Mitt Anbud are

skilled jobs, such as plumbing, electric work, and carpeting, conducted by firms or self-employed professionals. This platform could to some degree be seen as an opposite to Finn Småjobber, where skill requirements are low and jobs should not be conducted by professionals.

If we then turn to the dimension of specialised versus diverse work, we can contrast Finn Småjobber to Uber Pop. Although Uber Pop it is not currently operating in the Norwegian market, it was active from November 2014 to October 2017 (Oppegard, 2018). A characteristic of most ride-hailing platforms such as Uber and Lyft, is that they are specialised and low skilled: They operate within a narrow market, with low formal requirements for its workers. In essence, in addition to needing access to a car (their own or someone else’s), they only need a driving license. The platform only distributes ride-hailing, and does not open for other services. In contrast, Finn Småjobber provided a variety of jobs that did not have any formal skill requirements. However, as will be discussed in chapter seven, there were a lot of jobs requiring the use of a car, like moving jobs. These driving jobs were still only some of many possible jobs workers could take. For workers, Finn Småjobber offered a diverse range of jobs, and was hence more diverse than the specialised Uber Pop.

In Figure 6, I have put Finn Småjobber, Mitt Anbud and Uber into a matrix based on professional and specialised attributes of the platforms. Mitt Anbud is highly professional and somewhat specialised. Uber Pop is very specialised, as the labour is limited only to taxi-like services. In the case of Finn Småjobber, the work was diverse and explicitly non-professional.

In sum, Finn Småjobber positioned itself within a low-skill, generic part of the labour market. As outlined in the working hypothesis in section 3.3.2, labour platforms that are distributing generic, low-skilled labour provides the platform with a larger pool of potential workers. In contrast to Mitt Anbud, that has higher skill demands for its workers, anyone could in theory use Finn Småjobber to work,

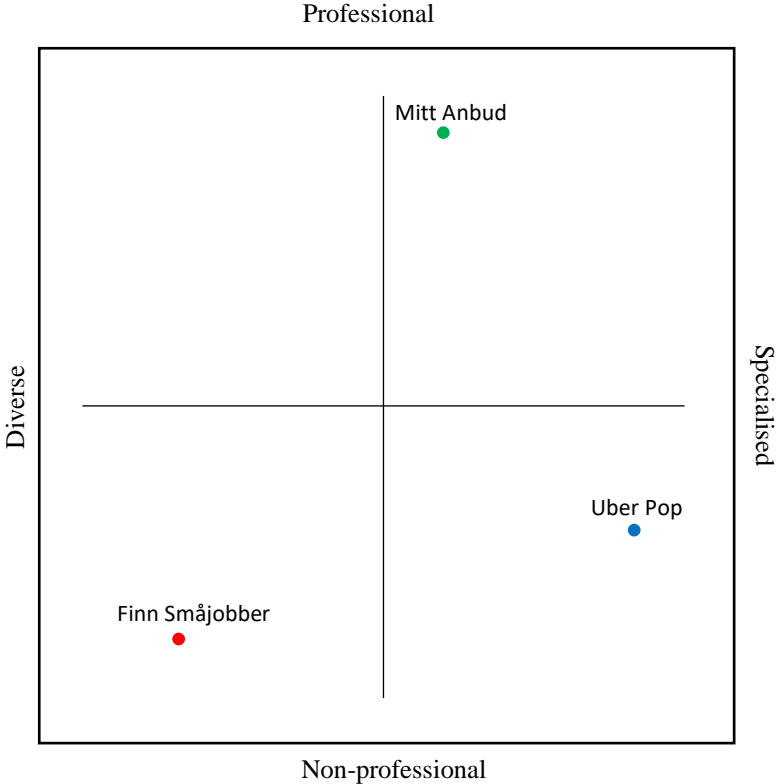


Figure 6: Platforms in the professional specialisation matrix

and thus the platform could tap into a larger crowd of on demand workers. How this affected workers bargaining power will be further discussed in section 7.4, where the competition between workers will be analysed in depth. The degree of professional specialisation on platforms must be seen in light of the next section on what barriers of entry Finn Småjobber had for workers.

6.3 Barriers of entry

Gandini refers to how platform workers log onto an app and become “subject to an external authority” (2019, p. 1045). The possibilities and barriers for accessing platforms are however different between platforms. The question then becomes: How do workers get access to the platform? As discussed previously, working through Finn Småjobber explicitly did not require any formal skills. To get access to the platform, you only needed to make an account and create a profile. The platform stated that “a personal photo and a good description” would increase the chance of “winning jobs”. After you had created an account you were ready to “pitch yourself” to potential employers (Finn.no, 2019e).

In other words, the platform did not conduct any further control of who joined the platform to work. Michael explained: *“There wasn’t any screening of the workers. If you know TaskRabbit for instance, there you are almost literally employed. I guess we just tried it out [as in let workers enter the platform].”* On the American labour platform TaskRabbit, which has many similarities with Finn Småjobber, workers register online and attend so-called “onboarding sessions” before being able to join and work (TaskRabbit, n.d.-a). On Luado, Finn Småjobber’s biggest competitor at the time, new workers are sent an instruction video accompanied by a test that they must pass before joining. After the test is passed, Luado manually checks and verifies the account (Luado, n.d.-b) On Finn Småjobber, workers were not required to pass a test, go through a background check or any interview to get access. When asked what Finn Småjobber knew about the workers, Richard answered: *“Nothing other than their profile pictures. They had the option of verifying themselves through BankID. I can’t remember how large the share was of users that verified their account. We didn’t know anything other than that.”*

Everyone could see what jobs were posted on the platform, even if one didn’t have an account. What you needed an account for, was to unlock (as in “show interest in”) jobs. In order to unlock jobs, workers needed to have a Finn Småjobber subscription, which granted them a

given number of “unlocks” per month. The smallest and most affordable subscription, “Hobby”, let workers unlock 4 jobs for 49 NOK/month. “Standard” let workers unlock 10 jobs for 139 NOK/month, while “Super Helper” let workers unlock 20 jobs, and a few other perks for 299 NOK/month (Finn.no, 2017a). Richard said this about subscriptions:

Richard: *“We had different subscription solutions, different subscriptions to be able to offer help on jobs. That was introduced to get more serious inquiries. If everything was free then we had heard from user interviews [Finn interviewing customers on the platform] that people would say they could do the job, but then you wouldn’t get a response and they didn’t show up. The users needed to have a little ‘buyin’, [to] show that they were really interested.”*

In other words, the subscriptions and fees to unlock jobs were according to Finn småjobber introduced as a measure to ensure serious inquiries on the platform. Instead of screening new workers, all workers were required to pay to access the labour market, to show that they were invested. In this sense, they were both workers and customers, paying for the opportunity to be selected for jobs.

By demanding that workers had a “buy-in”, Finn Småjobber thus reduced the need spend resources mediating who got access to the platform. This in turn made the process of new workers joining the platform a quick one; just buy a subscription and get to work. In the theory chapter 3.3.4, I argued that platforms with a stronger connection between workers and the platform (as best illustrated by a standard employment relationship) would be forced to do a more thorough check of who they were essentially hiring. On the other end of the spectrum, Finn Småjobber matches well with platforms that have loose worker-platform-connections. As they did not enter into a formal employment relationship with workers, with all the responsibility that entailed, they could have a more open and accessible platform for workers.

This also increases a platform’s availability for potential new workers. As pointed out previously, Prassl (2018) argues that a common characteristic among all platforms is their dependence on a large crowd of on-demand labour. In the labour-capital dichotomy, capital is in the dual position of both needing to control labour, as well as making sure that workers consent to work. Finn Småjobber sought to do this by offering low barriers for entering the platform.. By reducing barriers, labour platforms can access a larger crowd of workers. Thus, Finn Småjobber’s choice not to control who joined the platform was beneficial as it increased

their potential pool of workers. According to the previously mentioned 2017 Fafo-report, Finn Småjobber had approximately 2000 registered workers, and their numbers also indicated a high turnover of workers on the platform, where most of the workers did not do many jobs, while also having a core of workers that were significantly more active (Alsos et al., 2017, p. 56).

In sum, Finn Småjobber operated in line with the working hypothesis outlined in section 6.3, having low barriers for workers to access the platform. However, this was implemented in a distinctive way: Instead of monitoring and screening workers who joined the platform, they implemented a *financial* barrier. By demanding a “buy-in” from workers, both through the subscriptions and unlocking of jobs, they sought to reduce the need to moderate out what they identified as unserious workers.

6.4 Platform model: connecting, controlling and outsourcing

What sort of space did the workers have to manoeuvre in pursuit of and while doing jobs? We have now looked at the relationship between platform and workers, the level of professional specialisation in the labour, and barriers of entry to use the platform. In this section I will analyse how the platform actually controlled and coordinated the labour (transactions). Whereas we in section 6.1 were looking at the *formal* work arrangements, we are in this section discussing *technological* work arrangements: Put in a different way, we are here looking at the code/space that the workers interacted with in order to get jobs.

When launched, Finn Småjobber was an expansion of the well-established Finn-marketplace, where you used the same account to get access to the different platforms (second hand, real estate, etc). It was an already established milieu for transactions between private parties, and between private parties and professional actors: The space was familiar to its users. As we have also discussed in the theory section, a key characteristic of labour platforms is that they position themselves between buyers and sellers of labour power. They extract a surplus from the transactions conducted through the platform, effectively charging buyers and/or sellers for access to contact information. Different platforms have different ways of controlling these transactions.

When describing how Finn Småjobber operated, Michael and Richard distinguished between job owners and “helpers” experiences. For job owners, informant Richard explained that

Småjobber worked as follows: *“If you had a job that you wanted done, you filled out a form. You gave the job a title, wrote a description, posted some pictures and set a price and wrote where the job was to be done. Then you could publish it.”* Each job on the platform was posted by a private person, through their Finn.no-account. By publishing a job, you became a “job owner”. Remuneration will be discussed in detail in section 6.6, but for now it should be emphasised that the job owners set the prices they were willing to pay. After the job had been published, the job owner then had to wait for potential workers to unlock their job.

For workers, Richard explained that the platform worked as follows:

Richard: *“On the other side of the marketplace, Finn.no users could click into Finn Småjobber and see what jobs were available in different categories. The categories have changed a bit over time, but now [in the late period of Finn Småjobbers existence] there are five main categories, with between five to seven subcategories. As a helper, which we called it, you could then click a button to let people know that you wanted to do the job. For that to happen you needed to pay a small fee.”*

All jobs that were posted could be browsed by potential workers. Several workers could show interest in a job, and then the job owner could choose which of the workers s/he wanted to hire – based on reviews, ratings and direct communication with workers that had shown interest. The fee workers had to pay to unlock a job was relative to the payment: the higher the pay, the higher the fee to unlock.

An important part of labour platforms is based on information asymmetries: the platform purposefully limiting the users access to information (Schmidt, 2017). This strategy was also used by Finn Småjobber, who controlled the platforms flow of information, only allowing workers and job owners to communicate after they had unlocked jobs. This was however a challenge according to Michael and Richard.

Richard: *“[After the worker had unlocked the job], people could start sending messages. A lot of helpers gave their private numbers and wanted to continue the conversations through SMS or in private. I think we wanted the communication to go through Finn”*

Michael: *“We wanted the traffic to go through Finn, so that we could find out who people were in contact with, and who they eventually chose, if they had communicated*

with several people. If we were able to keep them [communicating through Finn], then we had a button that said 'who did you choose?', so that people could get ratings."

This emphasises an important point: choices of platform model, has implications for how and what activity you can control through the platform. Most labour platforms control the activity by providing apps that are important tools when workers are conducting jobs. In the case of Finn Småjobber, they did not provide a dedicated app. Instead, you accessed the platform via your browser:

Michael: *"You only accessed through the web, but it worked on a mobile browser. It had a completely different flow than the regular marketplace, it was much more advanced."*

Richard added: *"There was a link to the page from the app, so you could get straight to the browser version."*

This is an interesting aspect of Finn Småjobber, as labour platforms are almost synonymous with apps. As Finn Småjobbers main function was to provide a platform for publishing and browsing jobs, the platform had no practical function in the actual execution of the jobs. As an example Foodora-couriers log onto the platform to start working, and get orders and directions through the app. In the case of Småjobber, the platform had no such practical function, since its main purpose was to initiate and mediate contact. Once contact had been initiated, the communication could go outside of the platform. In other words, there was no need for the platform to incorporate Finn Småjobber into the existing Finn.no app. The fact that helpers only needed the platform to initiate contact, meant that that was the main point of the transaction that the platform could control, and the only point at which they could extract surplus (see 6.6 for a further discussion).

This was in turn based on the level of outsourcing on the platform. Finn Småjobber was what Srnicek (2017) characterises as a lean platform: It did not provide any tools for its workers, only the platform itself. This resembles Uber, which does not provide drivers with cars, only an app through which they can communicate with passengers and get trips. Finn Småjobber was however even more lean than Uber, as it did not use algorithmic task assignment to assign jobs to workers: the workers themselves had to monitor the platform, looking for potential jobs. This in turn meant that workers were paid only for the jobs they actually got, and not for the work they did monitoring the platform, keeping up with the latest jobs posted and when they

communicated with potential employers after having unlocked the jobs. As argued by Schimdt (2017), many platforms also outsource human resource management to its workers, as was the case on Finn Småjobber.

So, what did Finn Småjobber actually control of the activity on the platform? When asked about how they moderated the platform, my informants stated Finn Småjobber mainly focused on moderating the jobs posted:

Michael: *“Everything was moderated, all the jobs. And I think the reviews also were moderated?”*

Richard: *“They were moderated, but not all of them. It was done in the cases where something had come up. But all the jobs were moderated. We had a really good customer service group that were very alert. Problems rarely occurred.”*

A lot of research on platform labour discusses the use of algorithmic management, where algorithms are monitoring and controlling the labour process (Lee et al., 2015; Rosenblat & Stark, 2015). Interestingly, the little moderation that was done on Finn Småjobber was conducted by human workers, not algorithms.

The moderators could then intervene if the jobs that were posted did not follow Finn Småjobber’s guidelines: Michael: *“It was in the cases where the jobs weren’t proper small jobs, when people were asking for professional services. Then you had to turn them down and forward them to Mitt Anbud.”* Richard: *“It could be stuff like changing car tires, or plumbing jobs.”* This underpins the complementarity of Finn Småjobber and Mitt Anbud: What was too professional to be done through Finn Småjobber could be done through Mitt Anbud. In turn, Finn Småjobber provided a platform for jobs that were too “small” to fit the Mitt Anbud business model. This way Schibsted could keep customers within their platforms.

The platform did not moderate the communication between helpers and job owners. Michael: *“We [Finn Småjobber] couldn’t look at what people wrote in the chats.”* *“We didn’t get involved in peoples messages,”* Richard added, referring to privacy and EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). When asked if the actual execution of the jobs were moderated in any way, the informants emphasised that they never monitored that:

Richard: *“We didn’t have any insights into [the quality of the jobs] besides the reviews.”*

Michael: *“But there were very few disputes, things worked really well.”*

Richard: *“You know, Finn is just a marketplace.”*

Michael: *“If you buy a camera from me [as a private person] you can’t complain to Finn if there’s something wrong with the camera.”*

These statements illustrate an important point: Finn Småjobber was operated and controlled in the same way as the ordinary Finn.no-marketplace. For Finn.no, the Småjobber-platform was just another form of marketplace, where people could buy and sell labour. We can hence understand Finn Småjobber as an expansion of Finn.no’s activities into informal labour, but under the same logic as on their ordinary marketplace. As Michael stated:

Michael: *“We moderated the jobs [his emphasis] to make sure that the jobs were proper jobs, with good descriptions. That they were small jobs. That was [pauses], that was what we offered, the quality of the jobs. Then the helpers came in and offered their services and showed interest in jobs.”*

For Finn, their moderation was done when the job had been deemed fit for publication on the platform, and their involvement stopped when the job had been unlocked.

Four posted jobs can briefly illustrate some of the challenges that the platform faced with posted jobs. All of them were published on the platform, and have been accessed through Wayback Machine. The first example is a job owner is requesting child care in the US. The job is listed with a payment of 200 NOK, and in the job description it says that “we can agree on terms and conditions” (Finn.no, 2018a). In the second example, the job owner is requesting someone to put sunshields on his car window. The job is listed with a payment of 1 NOK, and in the description the job owner asks people to contact him and “name their price” (Finn.no, 2018d). In the third example, the job owner is requesting someone to do weekly cleaning of a house, listed at 200 NOK per hour (Finn.no, 2018b). As previously discussed, a small job is a one time job, and thus this job is not a small job. In the fourth and final example, the job owner wants to replace a window in his basement. According to the description, the job involves cutting out a larger hole in a thick concrete wall. The job is listed at 1500 NOK, but in the description it says that “the price is just an indication, and we will select the best offer based on a total assessment” (Finn.no, 2018c).

A comprehensive study of the quality and content of the jobs that were posted on Finn Småjobber is beyond the scope of this thesis. Although these examples obviously cannot be

argued to be representative of *all* jobs posted on the platform, they illustrate the complex landscape of generalist labour platforms (see previous discussions in 3.3.2 and 6.2), as the variety of jobs renders it difficult, if not to say impossible, to apply a “one-size-fits-all”-solution for monitoring and moderation. On a specialized platform, such as a ride hailing platform, the platform primarily needs to solve *one* problem; finding the driver than can bring x from point a to point b. The more diverse and complex the work on the platform is, the more difficult it becomes for a platform to use large scale algorithmic control.

A point to emphasise here are labour platform’s role in blurring out or underplaying the role of labour on platforms. The original Finn marketplace was launched in 2000, and at the time Finn Småjobber was launched, Finn.no was the Norwegian webpage with the most page views per week (TNS Gallup, 2014). In other words, when Finn Småjobber was launched, the Finn marketplace was already well established in Norway. With the addition of Småjobber, labour was just another product you could buy and sell, using the same accounts as you had used on Finn. Both for workers and job owners, many of them were already a part of the Finn eco system. This is very different from most labour platforms, that are often start-ups. When Uber established themselves in Norway, they were a new actor in the Norwegian taxi service market; Finn was an already established platform in Norway, that expanded into platform labour.

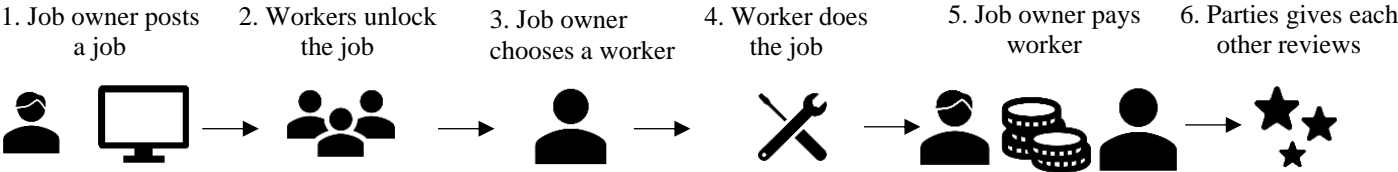


Figure 7: Finn Småjobber’s labour process

In sum, Finn Småjobber had several characteristics and tactics of control and outsourcing common on labour platforms. In line with the working hypothesis, it purposefully outsourced several aspects of the labour process to its workers. It was a lean platform similar to Uber, as it did not provide any tools for its workers to use while doing jobs. However, in some aspects it was even more outsourced than Uber, as it also outsourced the allocation of jobs to the workers, by not using algorithmic task assignment. When it came to controlling information, the platform also operated in line with the working hypothesis, through utilising information asymmetries.

Like Uber and Foodora, Finn Småjobber was the point of initial contact between workers and customers. However, once jobs were unlocked, and workers were in contact with job owners, the platform was no longer needed in the labour process. As the jobs were not reliant on maps or payments through the platform (which will be further discussed in section 6.6) like on Uber and Foodora, the platform did not need to provide its workers with an app. In this sense, Finn Småjobber was even more outsourced than most labour platforms, being a laissez-faire platform mostly coordinated by job owners and workers themselves. This also illustrates how the choice to not control something is also a form of control.

6.5 Techno-normative control: ratings and outsourced customer care

How did Finn Småjobber use techno-normative control mechanisms? I have previously discussed how labour platforms wish to control the labour process, and that this is done through the use of different (design) tactics. As discussed in section 3.3.5, techno-normative control is a clear example of the hyper-outsourced model used on labour platforms; In addition to outsourcing the responsibility of providing tools for the job to the workers, hyper-outsourced platforms also outsource performance reviews and similar control measures.

As most labour platforms, Finn Småjobber used a rating system as a key part of their control regime. After a job was done, workers and job owners were given the opportunity to rate each other on a scale of one to five stars, and to write a small review. Michael explained the ratings as follows:

Michael: “[Workers] could make a profile, with a picture of themselves and what they had done of different jobs, what ratings they had. That was a very central aspect of this, [after getting a job done] job owners got an email where they were asked ‘how satisfied are you?’, and were encouraged to give a rating and a text description. It was important for helpers to do as good a job as possible so that you got good ratings. That way you could win more jobs.”

For Finn Småjobber, the rating system provided an incentive for workers to do a good job. If you did, you would get good ratings, that in turn meant you could “win more jobs”. This way we can understand good ratings as a comparative advantage in a system where workers were in effect competing with each other for the same jobs.

In addition to the rating system functioning as a quality control mechanism, it was also central in the platform's effort to establish trust between workers and job owners. This was according to Michael important: *"The reviews are very important, your reputation is very important. It's two private parties involved, people get to come into your home. It's very personal."* The form of job and contact being distributed between the parties, where workers would go into people's homes to do jobs, meant that the rating system provided a crucial point of establishing trust. Michael underpinned his trust in the system by saying: *"I have used it several times myself. I found my maid there."*

Finn Småjobber had no regular contact with the workers, and their only way of knowing if jobs were done properly was by looking at the reviews. As they had outsourced such a large part of the process, the rating system essentially provided the only way of assuring quality control: On lean platforms, the techno-normative control mechanisms effectively replaces quality control and performance reviews. Thus, on Finn Småjobber workers were not evaluated by the platform, only by each individual job owner. This also went the other way, as workers could give reviews of job owners.

As expected in the working hypothesis, techno-normative control measures were an important part of Finn Småjobbers control regime. In sum, the rating system was thought to have four main purposes: Firstly, it was an important part of the process of selecting workers for jobs. As previously discussed, several workers could unlock the same job and chat with the job owner. The job owner could then look at the workers ratings when deciding on which worker s/he wanted to hire. Secondly, the rating became a part of the job itself, as workers knew that they could get rated after each job, and that ratings were important for getting new jobs. Through this it was meant to provide an incentive for workers to do a good job, pushing an internalised control instead of external. Thirdly, the rating system did also give workers the opportunity to control job owners, as the rating system worked both ways: job owners could rate workers, and workers could rate job owners. And lastly, the rating system provided a way of establishing trust on and in the platform itself. We will look at how workers experienced these ratings in section 7.5

6.6 Form of remuneration

To understand how platforms extract a surplus, we need to look at how they control and conduct payments. To analyse this, we are looking at two central points: First, how wages are set, and by whom. Secondly, where the payment takes place: Are payments conducted on or off the platform? Labour platforms have different payment models. Generally we can distinguish between hourly payments and piece rate payment, the latter being the most common on labour platforms.

On Finn Småjobber, workers were paid in a piece rate system. As mentioned earlier, job owners set the price they were willing to pay for their job, either a price by the hour or a fixed price. They were the ones that set the wages, and the platform was not involved in any way. This is unlike most platforms, that controls the prices either through fixed rates (like Luado) or algorithmic pricing (like Uber). Wages were then implicitly accepted by workers when they unlocked the jobs. Job owners individually setting prices is yet another example of an element of the labour process that is outsourced. This practice has been criticised in the media for allowing job owners to push prices down (Støbakk, 2015). Finn.no has met with the criticism by pointing out that there is no minimum wage in Norway, while adding that they found it unfortunate that some jobs were priced to low. However, this was ultimately the responsibility and the choice of those who posted jobs according to Finn Småjobber.

One area in which the platform *did* use algorithmic pricing, was on the payments to unlock jobs. The cost to unlock a job ranged between 15-95 NOK, and was based on two factors. First, the listing price of jobs – “the potential payment” – affected the price to unlock it, and the bigger the potential payment, the higher the price to unlock. Secondly, the cost to unlock also varied based on *when* the jobs were unlocked. According to the platform, the chance of getting a job was higher if you were the first to unlock it, and therefore it cost more if you were the first to unlock. If the job was not unlocked, the unlocking-fee was after “some time” lowered (Finn.no, 2019d).

On many platforms, such as Uber and Foodora, payments between workers and customers are conducted through the platform. Finn Småjobber operated with *off-platform payments*, in other words, the payments between workers and job owners were conducted outside of the platform. According to Michael these “*where either done with cash or through [the mobile payment*

application] Vipps.” Keeping payments outside of Finn Småjobber was a deliberate choice. They had considered other solutions, according to Michael:

Michael: *“We used a lot of time exploring the possibility of being part of the transaction, so that we could get a cut. That was the goal. But there were challenges with doing that, it was a bit before Vipps was launched. We were afraid that people would just skip doing transactions through the platform. [Asks rhetorically] ‘Why should we bother doing the transactions through Finn if they take 20 percent of the payment?’”*

In other words, they were afraid that by changing to a business model where they controlled payments between workers and job owners, and took a percentage of the transaction – instead of charging for subscriptions and unlocks’ – workers and job owners would simply conduct payments directly, effectively bypassing the platform. This would in turn have resulted in Finn Småjobber not getting a cut from the transaction.

Michael explained the alternative solution they considered as follows: *“We considered an Airbnb type solution, where people for instance agreed on 1000 NOK, and then [the job owner] would pay 1100 and [the helper] would receive 900. That was what we wanted to do.”* When asked why they chose not to, he replied: Michael: *“It was both a technical question, and we were also worried that people would conduct payments outside of the platform.”* Richard added: *“It would have been a lot of work where we didn’t get anything in return.”* As a result, they did not implement these changes. Interestingly, this outlined business model is similar to the model that Finn Småjobber’s competitor Luado is using: They charge a set hourly fee of 250 NOK for workers, and take a 20 percent commission (Luado, 2017).

This illustrates how the form of remuneration a platform uses, is also a part of its strategy for extracting surplus from transactions. In the same way that platforms have different tactics for controlling the labour process, they also have different tactics for extracting surplus from its users. Finn Småjobber did this in two ways. First, through their use of subscriptions for unlocking jobs, where workers paid to get a given number of unlocks per month. Second, they also charged for unlocking each job, and workers were charged regardless of if they were given the job or not. This distinguishes Finn Småjobber from other platforms, where your “buy in” is the time you are logged in and on standby, waiting to get jobs. Paying to access the platform, as you had to on Finn Småjobber, is not common among labour platforms.

A final point worth mentioning in relation to remuneration, is that, as workers on Finn Småjobber were only paid for the jobs they conducted, the work they did monitoring the platform looking for jobs was essentially unpaid labour. This is what Recchia (2020) labels as work-for-labour: in the gig economy, workers are forced into unpaid labour, looking for or waiting for their next gig. As an example, when the Uber driver is waiting for his next ride, his time and energy is still devoted to work, and he is essentially on unpaid standby for Uber. On Finn Småjobber workers were spending unpaid time on the platform, looking through and evaluating potential jobs. In addition, there were no payments for conducting ratings of employers, which was as previously stated a techno-normative control mechanism used by the platform to instil trust between parties. In this perspective, while rating you were doing unpaid quality control work for the platform.

In the working hypothesis, Finn Småjobber was expected to control payments as a means of extracting surplus from transactions. However, this was not the case: Finn Småjobber purposefully chose *not* to control payments through the platform. This was both to limit the potential risk that workers and customers would skip doing payments through the platform, and also to limit the potential responsibility that the platform could then get from being further involved in the transaction. Where other platforms extract surplus from transactions when parties conduct payments through the platform, Finn Småjobber instead extracted their surplus from workers unlocking jobs. The fact that workers were effectively charged to access jobs, through unlock-payments, is an uncommon tactic in platform labour, where workers normally access the platform for free, and are then charged a commission of payments for jobs.

6.7 Risk and flexibility

In the following section I examine how risk and flexibility was distributed between parties on the platform. Platforms often claim to offer flexibility and freedom to workers, that can choose when and how they want to work (see for instance TaskRabbit, n.d.-b). Although some platforms, such as Foodora in Norway, operate with time sheets and working hours, platform labour is predominantly characterised by loose worker-platform relations, and worker hence often face no demands on when they need to work. As touched upon in the previous section, the platform's choices (such as controlling payments), affects the distribution of risk between

the platform, workers and customers. This also means that workers often bears a greater part of the. So how did Finn Småjobber control and distribute risk and flexibility?

On its info section, Finn Småjobber provided what they called “tips for a safe marketplace”:

- “Think before you hand out your keys or other valuables
- Never pay for more than the work that has been done, and preferably after the job has been done
- It’s your choice. Buyers and sellers are responsible for who they do business with through Finn.no
- We do not recommend [doing small jobs] that are outside of Norwegian borders, as other regulations will apply“ (Finn.no, 2019c).

Again, the platform pushed the fact that Finn Småjobber was a *marketplace*, where users were free to trade with each other, just like on the regular Finn.no marketplace. As Michael put it: *“If you buy a camera from me [as a private person] you can’t complain to Finn if there’s something wrong with the camera.”* Any problems that might occur were the responsibility of the workers or job owners, and Finn did not get involved in any disputes. By limiting their involvement in transactions, Finn Småjobber effectively outsourced responsibility and risk to the workers.

This can be contrasted with Finn Småjobber’s competitor Luado, who offers insurance to its users, through a collaboration with the insurance company IF (Luado, n.d.-a). By offering insurance, Luado is able to extracting a surplus from the payments on the platform, as the insurance incentivises workers to conduct transactions through the platform. When Michael and Richard discussed implications of switching their model, they also mentioned insurance as a potential benefit that could have been included, to secure payments going through the platform:

Michael: *“What incentives would [users] have for using it to make payments? A possibility could have been insurances”.*

Me: *“Did you consider that? What would that have included?”*

Michael: *“It would have been an insurance for the helper, if he were to get injured or something like that.”*

By sticking with their business model, they in other words avoided taking the risk associated with transactions, but at the same time lost the possibility of implementing a more profitable business model. As a result, the risk was kept outsourced to workers and job owners.

The platforms outsourcing of risk also included the monitoring of whether workers were following tax regulations on small jobs and services: the workers themselves were responsible for monitoring and making sure that they used the platform within the limits of tax regulations (Finn.no, 2019f). As stated on the Norwegian Tax Administration's webpages, workers in Norway are responsible for making sure to follow the rules (Skatteetaten, 2019). In cases where the work is done in a manner or scale close to being a business, workers have to create their own company, and hence no longer be eligible for using Småjobber. Their alternative could then be to use Mitt Anbud.

Another interesting point when discussing the distribution of risk between helpers and job owners, came up during Michael and Richard's discussion of unlock payments:

Richard: *"Wasn't there also at one point so that you had to pay to post jobs?"*

Michael: *"We tested out charging 10 NOK for people to post jobs. That didn't work at all. We could see in the statistics that it didn't work. Everything we do can be measured."*

The platform experienced that charging job owners to post jobs led to a decrease in the amount of jobs being posted. When job owners were charged to post jobs, they risked paying to post a job on the that never was unlocked nor conducted. By not charging for posting jobs, this risk was removed, and job owners kept posting jobs.

As discussed previously, the platform extracted its surplus when helpers unlocked jobs. Several people could unlock the same job, but only one of them was chosen. In other words, the risk of paying without getting anything in return was removed for job owners, but kept for workers. When asked how workers had responded to paying without getting jobs, Michael replied:

Michael: *"It was especially when new helpers joined in, that didn't have a lot of reviews, then it was difficult for them to get jobs. Then we got feedbacks that you paid for something you didn't get. That was just the way the service was designed. This was the problem we wanted to avoid by taking a cut from transactions, because then you would get paid for what you actually did."*

In other words, job owners had no buy-in, while workers did. According to the platform, it was done to ensure that the job owners got “serious inquiries” from people that were “actually interested in doing jobs” (Finn.no, 2019g). In other words, payments to unlock jobs were framed as a way of ensuring serious and accountable interactions between providers and job owners. It is however interesting to note that this burden was solely put on the workers.

Workers and job owners had the flexibility of trading with who they wanted, but workers paid to unlock jobs, and job owners could choose which of the workers they wanted. The greatest risks to the job owner was posting a job and not get any response, that workers did not show up as agreed, or that something went wrong during the job. For workers, they risked losing money each time they unlocked a job, as they risked not getting picked by the job owner. In fact, they even risked that the job they unlocked could already have been assigned to somebody else: The job owners had to mark the job as “assigned” on the platform when they had chosen a worker – otherwise the job would seemingly still be up for grabs. Finn Småjobber stated that *“This is a risk that you as a helper take when you unlock a job”* (Finn.no, 2019b). In other words, risk and flexibility on the platform was not equally distributed, as workers took a gamble each time they unlocked a job.

In line with the working hypothesis, Finn Småjobber emphasised the workers’ and job owners’ flexibility and freedom when using the platform. However, as illustrated, the platforms subscription- and unlocking fees put the financial burden on the workers. As Finn Småjobber positioned itself outside of the labour transaction, any risk involved with the work was also firmly placed on the workers and job owners. This is also the inherent antagonism at the core of labour process studies: Workers, more or less voluntarily, sell their labour power on the labour market, consenting to the control of employers. The inherent antagonism of this voluntary subordination involves accepting terms and conditions that might not align perfectly with the worker’s needs. As identified by Woodcock, workers, platforms and consumers all seek to benefit from the flexibility that platforms services offer: “Workers are seeking to find more flexible and adaptable ways to work; platforms are freeing themselves from previous employment regulations, and consumers increasingly expect on-demand services” (Woodcock, 2019). The question then becomes who actually gain from this increased flexibility.

6.8 The Finn Småjobber code/space

In this chapter I have answered my first research question: *How did Finn Småjobber seek to control the labour process?*

In sum, Finn Småjobber sought to control the labour process through creating a code/space that utilised many of the common tactics of platform labour. Like most labour platforms, they did not employ workers. This is a common trait among labour platforms, but in the case of Finn Småjobber, the regulations on the form of work also prohibited the platform from employing workers. In the same way that Uber has framed itself as a technology company, Finn Småjobber framed itself as a “marketplace” for small jobs, with limited involvement in the activity on the platform. They provided work with low degrees of professionalisation and specialisation, and with low barriers of entry for workers to join the platform.

When it came to the common control mechanisms of labour platforms, Finn Småjobber used rating systems as a quality control mechanism. This way they essentially outsourced quality control and human resource management to workers and job owners. The platform also used unlock-payments as a way of assuring that the workers that showed interest in jobs were serious and “invested” in the job. Unlike most labour platforms, they did not use algorithmic management to monitor activity on the platform or to assign tasks to workers. Instead, they had staff that manually monitored the jobs that were posted, and the workers had to assign themselves jobs. Importantly, the main responsibility of Finn Småjobber according to themselves was quality control of jobs prior to them being published on the platform.

Unlike most platforms, which extract a surplus from the payments that are conducted through the platform, Finn Småjobber extracted their surplus from workers unlocking jobs. As payments were not conducted through the platform, the platform were forced to extract surplus prior to parties communicating, in fear of them bypassing the platform and communicating directly outside of the platform.

7. Working through Finn Småjobber: workers' experiences

The previous chapters have outlined what sort of action space Finn Småjobber sought to create. As discussed in the theory chapter, the agency of a labour platform is coded into the action space: Workers interact with(in) a space that is designed with intention, for concrete purposes. The question then becomes how these choices affect workers using the platform. The following chapter explores the perspective of workers, in order to answer the second research question: *How did workers experience working through the platform?* I will discuss my worker informants' experiences in light of Finn Småjobber's intentions and aims, to examine how deliberate choices in creating an action space affect those who utilise it.

7.1 Workers' motivations and perception of the platforms role

To better understand the perspectives of my worker informants, it is important to first discuss why they used the platform, and how they viewed Finn Småjobbers role.

7.1.1 Motivations

Frank had a full time office job at the time he worked through Finn Småjobber, and expressed that making some extra money was the main reason for using the platform: *"I thought it was fun to make some extra money on the side. I did it in addition to my regular job and my studies. I also worked as a Mystery Shopper. [...]It was just ways to make some extra money on the side"*. In addition to being motivated by money, Frank was also very interested in the opportunities new services such as Finn Småjobber offered. He had previous experience from a number of other platforms, including Uber Pop and the Norwegian transportation platform Nimbr: *"I also tried driving for Uber. It was really cool. The weekends that I drove, all the regular cabs were waiting at the taxi rank while I was driving non-stop"*. Of all my informants, he was the one that showed the most interest in the platform itself, expressing a general interest in discovering the possibilities these new services offered.

Informant Hans lived in a town just outside of Oslo, where he worked full time as a nurse. His first encounter with Finn Småjobber was on social media: *"I first heard about Finn Småjobber on Facebook. Somebody recommended it in one of those groups where people buy and sell different stuff. So then, I joined in. When I got divorced, I suddenly got a lot more free time. I thought I might as well use it for something useful."* This comment can be viewed in light of

the ethos of the “sharing economy”, where under-utilized assets are commodified for extra gains through platforms (Frenken & Schor, 2017). With the introduction of labour platforms, free time becomes yet another asset that can be commodified. With the possibility of doing on-demand gigs at any time, free time can essentially be framed as unproductive: Why “waste” your free time, when you can do something “useful” and make money from it?

Like Frank, Hans also expressed earning some extra money as the main motivation for using Finn Småjobber. He joined the platform to make money for a specific project: *“A few years ago I inherited a house from the 1970s that needed a lot of restauration. So I financed some of the refurbishing by doing jobs on Finn Småjobber. All the money I made from Finn Småjobber was put into an account that was ear marked for fixing the house.”* Hans was the only informant that expressed having a concrete project for which he was saving money. In other words, he was not in a precarious situation, using the money to make ends meet.

Informant Nina was introduced to the platform by a friend. She only worked through the platform on one occasion, setting up a trampoline for someone: *“I thought it was exiting to test it [Finn Småjobber] out, try something new.”* Informant Karen also heard about Finn Småjobber through a friend that was already using it. For Karen, the platform was first and foremost a flexible way of making money while she was travelling:

Karen: “At that time I was travelling a lot, living in different parts of Norway and abroad. I was living in my car and I crashed with friends sometimes. I used [Finn Småjobber] to make money fast – it was very flexible. I could have gotten a job other places, but then I would have lost that freedom. I could take jobs whenever and wherever it was convenient. So it felt very free and flexible.”

Informant George expressed that working through Finn Småjobber provided him with a flexible income at a time when he was unemployed and needed some extra money. His first experience with the platform was as a job owner, when he used it to hire someone for a job: *“I first used it back in 2017, when I hired a woman to clean my apartment before I went on a long vacation. She did small jobs on the side, and I was very happy with the experience, it was very easy”.*

When I asked him to describe what a “small job” was, he said the following:

George: “[It’s] something that isn’t permanent, like a day’s job or a few hours job. Just a small service. A small, paid service. It’s not a job in the normal sense, you don’t get a wage, you’re not employed, not obliged to ‘go to work’. You can choose for yourself,

be a bit free. So, in a sense it was more like a marketplace for freelancers, like a kind of marketplace where people worked for themselves in their own companies. People that were unemployed and needed some extra money on the side, instead of committing to a big job. That was why I used it, I was unemployed at the time.”

Informant Lars was in a similar situation as informant George, unemployed and in need of some extra money: *“I think I discovered it through the Finn pages. I saw that there was something called “Småjobber” and then I was curious as to what it was. And, yeah, it was a cool concept to either try to get jobs or put up jobs for others”*. He jokingly described his time working through the platform as his “glory days”:

Lars: “I had my glory days [laughs], I think it was about three or four years ago, before I started studying. When I say glory days I’m obviously joking, it was the only job I had at the time. I used it because I didn’t have work anywhere else. So my motivation was first and foremost that I could make money from of it, doing practical chores, for people that didn’t expect the best quality but just needed something done. It suited people like me that didn’t have a lot of practical experience, but were keen on trying new stuff.”

In her study of Foodora-couriers, Jesnes outline three ideal types of people working as Foodora couriers: “The student”, using the platform to earn some extra money while in pursuit of another career; “the labour market outsider”, a person struggling to find full time employment elsewhere; and the migrant worker, who does not speak Norwegian and is having a hard time finding a steady and decent job (Jesnes & Oppegaard, 2020, p. 61). In his study on Uber Black drivers in Oslo, Oppegaard also had similar findings: workers predominantly had ethnic minority backgrounds and were to a large extent migrants, often coming from low paid, physically demanding work and struggling to obtain decent employment (Oppegard, 2018).

George and Lars could to some degrees be characterised as labour market outsiders, while my other informants are harder to categorise. Frank, Hans and Nina, all having employment elsewhere, were the three that perhaps are most distant from any of these categories. Karen was a self-imposed labour market outsider, that wanted to engage in short term work in order to live a more flexible life. In other words, my informants had some similarities with workers identified on other platforms, but were generally in less precarious situations than workers identified on Foodora and Uber Black. Still, knowing that precarious workers, often with

minority or foreign backgrounds, dominate other Norwegian platforms, it is reasonable to assume that workers with similar backgrounds were also using Finn Småjobber.

7.1.2 View of the platform provider's' role

In order to get an understanding of how the workers perceived the role of Finn Småjobber, I asked them to describe what Finn Småjobber was, and also to describe what a “small job” was. As discussed in section 6.1, the platform did not express having any formal employment relationship with workers. This view was also shared by the workers, as none of them expressed that they considered Finn as resembling any form of formal employer. Nina for instance said: *“I thought that they [Finn] were the link between the worker and the employer, a communication channel.”*

When Hans described the platform, he highlighted the non-professional aspect of it:

Hans: “[Finn Småjobber] was a portal where you could get help from non-professional people. You registered yourself as a worker, wrote a bit about yourself, and you could also post pictures. There were all sorts of jobs you could do. Anything from transportation, painting, throwing out trash, fixing cars, changing doors. It was nice to have a place where you could go and search for jobs”.

The spatial metaphor Hans uses is interesting, describing the platform “a place” where workers could look for jobs. As discussed in chapter two, digital platforms are converging real and virtual space, where activities in real space are increasingly connected to virtual space and vice versa. Whereas the “place” to find these jobs could previously be on the bulletin board on the local super market, workers now had this place online.

Several workers echoed the platform's own label of Finn Småjobber being a “marketplace” – yet another interesting spatial metaphor. George, for instance, described the platform as follows:

George: “It was a little marketplace where you could take smaller jobs without committing to anything big. You didn't have to be employed or anything, you could just do the jobs for yourself. It was kind of like back in the old days, when the guys were waiting at the docks: Somebody wanted to change their roof, another wanted to empty

a sewer tank, and then they came down to the docks and picked a few guys to do the job.”

Platforms are viewed as rearranging existing markets (Srnicek, 2017), and George’s parallel to the guys hanging around on the docks looking for work is interesting in this regard: Gig work has been around for decades, and now these old structures of the labour market are mediated in new ways through digital platforms. This opens up to the question if labour platforms are the digitalised docks.

To summarize, money and the ability to choose when to work were the main motivations for all my worker informants, which matches findings from similar studies (Finstad, 2017; Teodoro et al., 2014). The workers were however in different situations. Frank, Hans and Nina were using the platform to make some extra money on the side of their regular jobs, while Karen, George and Lars used the platform to get an income, as they did not have permanent jobs at the time. For the unemployed, the platform offered a quick way to make money without applying for or committing to a regular job. Karen stood out as especially focused on the flexibility that the platform offered. An interesting contrast between Hans and the informants who were unemployed, was that he was in a position where he could put the money he made aside for refurbishing, while Karen, George and Lars relied more on the income for daily expenses. This illustrates the need for a sensitivity to the specific situation of every individual worker using labour platforms; They are not all in the same situation. One must both be cautious not to overstate the platform’s power over workers, while still scrutinizing the level of freedom that is being offered. A worker that is not financially reliant on a platform differs from a worker that is dependent on using it to get his/her income. This last point will be discussed further in section 7.6.

7.2 Subscribing to the “labour marketplace”

The subscription service was the closest thing to a formal relationship between Finn Småjobber and the workers. As previously discussed, the general barriers of entry to the platform were low. Anyone could browse jobs, but in order to unlock jobs you needed an account with a subscription. What did the workers think about the platform’s subscription model? Several of the informants had experienced how the platform tested different forms of subscription models. Lars described this as follows:

Lars: *“You paid a fee each month. In the beginning, you paid 50 NOK each month and then you could take on as many jobs as you wanted. Then [Finn] changed it so that you paid something like 40 NOK, 70 NOK or 100 NOK and you could then unlock like 4, 8 or an infinite number of jobs”.*

Me: *“Which of those models did you prefer?”*

Lars: *“The first one obviously had more benefits for us users. The second one was more advantageous for Finn. There were some advantages to the last one as well for us workers, but it was unnecessary to give users more options, you really only needed one choice: did you want the job or not? Maybe they changed it to spark new life into Finn Småjobber, maybe it didn’t go as well as they had expected. I was still interested in using [the platform].”*

Hans and Frank had similar reflections regarding this. They both expressed frustration with how the platform developed and implemented changes towards paying for jobs you risked not getting, an paying for subscriptions:

Hans: *“They made some changes to the platform, and then it became more of a frustration. In some way it was okay that it closed down, because it became more frustrating to use it: More irritations and expenses. In the beginning Finn [Småjobber] only took an arrangement fee. As I recall it, [at that point] only the person who got the job had to pay the fee to Finn. After a while that was changed, so that you had to pay to be able to send messages. Then you had to pay for sending messages, without being sure that you got the job. Then it started to get expensive. If the jobs paid between 200-600 NOK, you could risk paying money [fees] without getting anything in return. The motivation disappeared.”*

Frank: *“I thought [Finn Småjobber] was a cool service, a cool idea, but the implementation of it made it difficult to get much out of it. I used it a few times and then lost interest.”*

This point highlights the relative power imbalance in the platform labour triangle (see 3.3.1): Although platforms seek to build the impression that parties are engaging on equal terms, workers most often have no say in how labour platforms change or develop. Michael and Richard from Finn emphasised that the platform was interested in user feedback from workers. However, when Finn Småjobber ultimately decided to implement changes to the subscription

model, workers had two options: accept the changes or stop using the platform. In contrast, Foodora-couriers in Norway were able to force their employer to sign a collective agreement, after they went on strike (Solstad, 2019). This was made possible due to couriers having a formal employment relationship with Foodora.

In sum, the workers I interviewed saw Finn Småjobber as both a marketplace, a mediator and a communication channel. None of them saw Finn Småjobber as a form of employer. On this point, Finn had managed to establish their role as a neutral intermediary between supply and demand, that is often the aim of labour platforms. However, the workers frustration with how the platforms subscription model had developed, clearly illustrates that Finn Småjobber, through their ability to change the rules of the platform, asserted more control of the labour process than what a mere intermediary would be thought to.

7.3 Unlocking the labour market: work-for-labour

As discussed in section 6.4, Finn Småjobber did not use algorithmic task assignments. Instead, assigning jobs was outsourced to the workers themselves, where workers were forced to perform what Recchia (2020) describes as ‘work-for-labour’ – unpaid waiting or browsing for jobs. In this section I will discuss some of the tactics that workers experienced while doing work-for-labour, in pursuit of jobs. From my interviews with workers, I have identified three different stages workers went through in pursuit of jobs: 1) Monitoring, 2) unlocking, 3) pitching. I will now discuss important aspects of each of these three stages.

7.3.1 Monitoring

Workers used the Finn Småjobber website to look for potential jobs, as the platform did not have a dedicated app. All of the workers expressed that they found the platform’s website to be useful for browsing jobs, and found the ability to filter between different categories and locations to be especially useful tools. Hans described it as follows:

Hans: *“There was a search engine, and you could filter by stuff you wanted to do, radius and stuff like that, select where you wanted to display jobs from. There were mostly jobs in Oslo and the areas around Oslo.”* Frank: *“The ads were simple, with a description and some pictures. Some job ads were very well described, while others were more diffuse”.*

As discussed in section 3.3.6, on platforms where workers are paid in a piece rate system, they are not paid for the time they are waiting for, or actively looking for jobs. None of my informants had objections about doing this unpaid monitoring work, and it varied among them how much time and energy they put into it. Hans: *“I spent quite a lot of time on looking for jobs on the website. I sometimes looked at jobs [on Finn Småjobber] while I was on my regular job”*. As identified by Bajwa et al. (2018), one of the characteristics of gig work on platforms is the blurring of lines between personal and free time. If the platform does not offer fixed hours, and workers assign themselves jobs, it becomes difficult to separate when they are actually working. The fact that Hans used time from his day job to find jobs on Finn Småjobber perfectly illustrates how these lines between work and free time are blurred by platforms.

Other workers expressed a more relaxed approach to browsing jobs. Karen: *“As I recall, you could get notifications and see what were the most recent jobs posted. I looked for jobs when I fancied working, when I had the time.”* None of my informants said they used this notification option to get informed about new jobs. For Lars, browsing jobs was an exciting part of using the platform: *“You could get notifications, but I didn’t bother with that. I just sat down when I had the time. It was kind of like Facebook; ‘let’s see, is there anything interesting on here now? Building a bookshelf, that sounds interesting’”*.

Lars was also relaxed about monitoring and finding jobs:

Lars: *“For me it was more about what I wanted to do. I think that most people can learn to do stuff if they want to. I’m a pretty fast learner, so if I am put in situations where I don’t have any alternatives, I figure stuff out. I get things done. [...] It was also possible to choose jobs that you felt more comfortable doing. There were less physically demanding but more theoretical jobs, and then you also had the heavy physical jobs, jobs where you needed a car to do transport stuff. In those cases I used my family’s car.”*

As the platform was lean (see discussion 6.4), workers themselves had to provide the necessary equipment. This was also an element of consideration when looking for jobs. Several of the workers stated that they found out when they had a day off from other obligations, and borrowed a car from friends or family on that day, trying to conduct as many jobs as possible involving a car. These jobs could typically be moving jobs and disposal of trash. Informant Frank said he developed a strategy for when he was looking for jobs:

Frank: *“What I did was that I tried to get as many jobs in one day as possible. I went on the site the night before and tried to get as many jobs as I could [for the following day]. I rented a car and made sure that I got enough jobs to finance the car expenses and that I made some extra money. It was a calculated risk, I had to consider if there were enough jobs available”.*

Another aspect related to monitoring that came up during the interviews, was how workers, when looking at potential jobs, also had to consider whether they had the necessary skills to conduct the work. As discussed in section 6.2, Finn Småjobber was a low skill and generic labour platform, and professional jobs were not supposed to be posted on the platform. Still, Hans stated the following:

Hans: *“I only applied for jobs that were relevant to me, so I didn’t care much about the other jobs. I saw people [job owners] that wanted electricians and plumbers. That was not meant to be on the platform, because those were skilled jobs. I concentrated on transportation and trash. I’ve had a small trailer standing in my courtyard for years, so I used that for the jobs.”*

Two important points should be emphasised in this regard. First, as a consequence of the lean platform model, workers have to provide tools for the jobs they are doing. This also means that – much like in the ordinary labour market – people with resources are better equipped to get jobs. On Finn Småjobber, owning a car, a trailer or power tools gave you more options to choose between jobs, and it also offered advantages in the process where job owners picked workers (see section 7.3.3). The second point relates to Hans’ observation about professional jobs not suited for the platform, such as plumbing and electrical jobs. This indicates that, despite the platform moderating the jobs that were posted, jobs that violated the platforms rules were still posted. None of my informants said they had conducted jobs they were not qualified for. Karen, for instance, put it like this: *“I wouldn’t have taken any jobs that I knew I couldn’t do. I only took jobs that I knew I could handle.”*

7.3.2 Unlocking

When workers had identified jobs they wanted to do, the next step was to unlock the jobs. The fact that they had to pay to unlock a job, with the potential risk of not getting picked, forced workers to carefully consider whether it was worth the risk. Karen: *“You had to think about if*

it was worth it. Since it cost money to show interest [unlock jobs], I considered if the odds were good that I would get the job. I don't remember exactly how much it cost, but I remember that I thought it was a bit much". Before unlocking the jobs, Karen considered what the job paid and what it entailed:

Karen: "You wouldn't bother doing a big job that didn't pay well. It also had to be a [type of] job that you knew and could manage. I often looked for painting jobs, mostly outdoors, and cleaning jobs. You thought about if the job was worth it, there were a lot of people that offered low payments, then you didn't bother. And you also knew that there was a difference between cleaning the house of someone tidy, versus cleaning the house of someone that was moving out – more work. I didn't experience any jobs being very different from the [ad] descriptions, but my friend experienced that. She had an appointment for a job that turned out to be way bigger than she had expected."

Hans also emphasised the need to evaluate the job before unlocking it: *"You could see if the job was priced too low or too high. I tried to find jobs that were realistically [reasonably] priced, and then never push prices up or down."*

De Stefano (2016) discusses how platform work could potentially lead to stress and uncertainty about whether or not one will be able to get jobs and an income, due to the shifts in supply and demand. As workers on Finn Småjobber were competing with each other, and were not guaranteed getting any of the jobs they unlocked, an element of stress was present in the unlocking process. Lars, among others, confirmed this:

Lars: "You never knew whether you would get the job, so you needed to be active and apply for several jobs at a time. You wouldn't get all [of them], but you would get some. I guess that's part of the excitement, that stressful aspect where you didn't know if you would be chosen for the job. I want to become an actor, so maybe there's something in me that kind of like that [aspect]."

On the platform, workers could see if a job had already been unlocked by competing workers. They could also filter jobs to only see the ones that had not already been unlocked. According to Frank, it was an advantage if you were the first one to unlock a job:

Frank: "You should be the first one to unlock the job, that was my experience. I don't think I ever [even] got a response if I was the second person to unlock a job. You could

see the slots being filled up with other people [workers]. I filtered the jobs to see the most ones that had been posted. It was a bigger chance of getting those jobs”.

Hans echoed this experience: *“It was first come, first served”*. The fact that Frank and Hans experienced it as crucial to be the first one to unlock a job, runs somewhat counter to the idea that a job owner would wait until all of the five slots had been filled and choose workers there after by comparing ratings and reviews. Still, their impression matched what Finn Småjobber had also identified, when they charged more for the first one to unlock a job: Statistically, the chances of getting the job was higher if you were the first one to unlock it (Finn.no, 2019d).

7.3.3 Pitching

After having unlocked a job, workers could communicate directly with the job owner on the platform’s website. Hans: *“When you had unlocked a job, you could say something about yourself. It was like a mini-interview”*. Workers had mixed experiences with how well this communication actually worked. Frank, for instance, found it challenging: *“It was difficult to get responses, and difficult to get in contact with people.”* George on the other hand had not experienced problems with this: *“You sent a message and told them about yourself, your experience and that kind of stuff. Then I was contacted after that. As I recall it, it was really easy, no hassle: There was a job that had to be done, a tendering process or something like that – and then it was done.”*

Hans described the communication that followed after the job was unlocked as “a mini-interview”. Karen emphasized the importance of making a good impression in the chat with the job owner: *“You messaged the person, showed interest by sending a message. I don’t think you had to, but your chances of getting the job increased if you wrote something.”* In these “mini-interviews”, the worker needed to argue why s/he would be a good fit for the job, Karen said:

Karen: *“You sent messages, and wrote about yourself, what kind of experience you had. It depended on the job that you were trying to get, you wrote about similar jobs you had done previously. It was important to write that you were thorough [...] For instance, there was one job where they [the job owners] wanted somebody to look after their dog, I think it was for like three or four weeks. I was working in the mountains as a shepherd at that time, and I wrote that I wanted the dog as company. I ended up having the dog for almost two months. I got company and got paid at the same time.”*

Thus, after both having identified and unlocked a job, workers needed to “pitch” themselves to workers in “mini-interviews”, in an attempt to convince job owners that they were the right (wo)man for the job. This illustrates an aspect of the emotional labour that occurs on labour platforms, as discussed by Gandini (2019), where workers need ingratiate themselves with new employers for each gig.

7.3.4 Summary: Unlocking the labour market

In sum, most of the workers said they made careful considerations before they unlocked any job. This was a consequence of a constant risk calculation, as they in fact could end up losing - instead of earning - money, if they did not get the gig. Moreover, the workers also said they needed to consider the job description, whether they were fit to the task and take into account whether the job seemed to be reasonably remunerated. As workers never could be sure whether they would get a job or not, some of them ended up unlocking even more jobs than they believed they would get. Once a job was unlocked, the worker increased his or her chances by making a good impression on the job owner in a self-promoting “micro-job-interview” that often took place. Lastly, it is worth noting that while the workers were competing with each other, and had to pay to take part in this competition, the job owners took no economic risk – workers were effectively on the losing end of a buyer’s market. As emphasised by Schmidt (2017), on platforms, either the one buying or the one selling needs to finance the platform, and in the case of Finn Småjobber, the platform was effectively financed by the workers through subscriptions and unlocking jobs.

7.4 Competing on a buyer's market

As discussed in section 6.4, Finn Småjobber purposefully limited their involvement in the interactions between helpers and job owners, primarily facilitating the initial contact between the two parties. They did not control who joined the platform or who interacted with each other than through charging for subscriptions and unlocks; if you paid, you were free to communicate. Choices of what to control, and what not to control, affects the labour process through defining the limits and possibilities of workers. In my interviews, three important consequences of the platforms control choices were emphasised by the workers: Competing with professional workers, workers and job owners pushing wages down, and discrimination against workers. I will discuss each of these findings in the following section.

7.4.1 Professional workers?

As discussed in section 6.2, the platform explicitly stated that Finn Småjobber was not intended to be used by professionals. Still, several of my informants identified what they perceived as more professional actors competing with the other workers on the platform.

Hans: *“There were a lot of firms that came in and took jobs, and that was not supposed to happen. I got pretty annoyed by that.”*

Me: How did you spot the difference between regular workers and firms?

Hans: *“The firms tried to brand themselves, [they] wrote about different car sizes, used logos, branded themselves as moving companies. Some of them were pretty good at branding themselves as businesses. On one occasion when I was messaging about a job, I was told that a company could be there within the hour. I actually reported it to Finn without getting any response about it. I just got a generic response like ‘we have received your message’.”*

George had also noticed the competition from more professional actors:

George: *“[The competition] was pretty intense, there were a lot of people that were more ‘on fire’ than I was. Those moving firms that had everything sorted out, with a car and that kind of stuff. They had planned things out way more than I had, and were much more active. Then I thought I didn’t have a chance. They also had a lot more reviews than me. [...] They had everything in order, loads of reviews since they had been at it for so long. It looked more professional, with a name, pictures with logos and that kind*

of stuff. I'm not sure if you could make a business account there, but they seemed very professional. Then the competition was pretty tough."

When talking about the tax rules, Frank also mentioned professional-looking workers posing with vans in their profile pictures: *"I think people used it more than what was legal, especially the ones with vans in their profile pictures [laughs]. I suspect that they maybe were above the tax limits. Maybe they declared their income, I don't know, but I suspect that that never happened."*

This is interesting, as the platform was not supposed to be used by professionals. As previously discussed, Finn focused on monitoring the jobs that were posted, and that they were within the boundaries of what was classified as a small job. Finn Småjobber did not monitor who joined the platform, and accordingly did not control or filter out professional workers and businesses that worked through the platform and competed with "regular" workers.

7.4.2 Race to the bottom

Another point that several workers discussed, was haggling and underbidding after jobs had been unlocked. This could be initiated by the job owners, haggling to push prices down, or by the helpers underbidding other workers as a strategy to "win" jobs. Hans said that *"haggling happened fairly often. Not all the time, but often."* He became frustrated by job owners trying to push prices down:

Hans: *"There were several instances where people had posted a job with a fair price, and then started to haggle. Then I confronted them with the fact that what we paid to unlock the jobs were set by the initial sum."*

Me: *"How did they respond?"*

George: *"They expressed very little understanding!"*

As previously discussed, prices for jobs were set by job owners when publishing jobs, and workers paid a sum relative to the listed payment to unlock them. If the job was done at a lower price than listed, they would effectively have been charged more than necessary to unlock. Despite this, some of my informants used underbidding as a strategy to get jobs. Lars said he had done it on several occasions:

Lars: *“I wrote something like ‘Hi my name is Lars and I’m willing to do it a couple of hundred NOKs cheaper than the others, I really want to do this etc.’”*

Me: “So it was a form of bidding war?”

Lars: *“Yeah, that could happen. After a while I used it as a strategy. I thought it was better to get the job even if you didn’t make as much money on it. I tried it out a few times, since many people didn’t respond, I started offering lower prices. It worked, occasionally”.*

He had however never experienced job owners push prices down, like Hans had experienced:

Lars: *“Most times they [job owners] just went with it, there wasn’t a lot of negotiations. There could be some negotiations afterwards, if the job turned out to be bigger than initially described. But I haven’t heard about anyone that exploited it. If the person that chose [i.e. the job owner] had started pushing the prices down I think people would have reacted badly.”*

This use of haggling and underbidding is a normal part of Finn.no’s regular marketplace, where users occasionally negotiate the price on second hand goods. It is interesting that the same market tendencies were also present in the transactions of labour, underpinning the role labour platforms play in commodifying labour. In a study of crowdworkers – gig workers working online – in Sub-Saharan Africa and South-east Asia, Graham et al. found examples of a “race to the bottom” in wage rates, as workers were unable to exert any significant bargaining power towards customers (M. Graham et al., 2017). It is interesting to observe that the same tendencies also were present on a Norwegian, geographically tethered labour platform. The use of underbidding as a strategy to get jobs, illustrates how the platform’s code/space enable interactions not necessarily intended by the platform provider: The chat function was initially set up to enable the parties to make practical arrangements, but could also be used to deliberately compete and push prices down. One could imagine an alternative code/space, where the users could not chat with the job owners up front, but only disclose at which times they were free to conduct the jobs. Then the job owner could see when workers were available, and choose based on what fit with their schedule.

7.4.3 Discrimination

When discussing the competition on the platform, several informants brought up the issue of possible and probable discrimination against foreigners/non-Norwegians. Informant Karen found being a “Norwegian girl” to be an advantage:

Karen: “There was some competition. It’s perhaps a bit rude to say, but there were a lot of foreigners [on the platform]. I think it was easier to get jobs as a Norwegian girl. You know, when they see that it is a Norwegian girl, people feel more safe bringing you into their home.”

George was of the same opinion:

George: “I definitely think there was discrimination there. And a lot harder for them (foreigners) to get jobs than us. When it’s Norwegians, people just go ‘yeah, this is good’, but if it’s a foreigner you wouldn’t give them your keys. You don’t think about these things, but Norwegians have a tendency to be like that. If you talked to foreigners you would probably hear a whole different story.”

As previously reflected upon in section 4.5.1, in a critical discussion on potential (methodological) challenges of my sample, none of my informants are ethnic minority workers. I do accordingly not have descriptions of this type of discrimination first hand. However, extensive research on discrimination in the Norwegian labour market have shown that discrimination is a significant obstacle for workers with ethnic minority backgrounds looking for work in general (Midtbøen, 2015). As an example, Midtbøen and Rogstad (2012) found that job applicants with Pakistani names were on average 25 percent less likely to get a job interview than an applicant with identical qualifications, but with a Norwegian name. In other words, despite not having first-hand accounts of discrimination from workers with ethnic minority backgrounds, it is reasonable to assume that workers with ethnic minority backgrounds experienced discrimination on Finn Småjobber. This is an aspect of platform labour that should be researched further.

7.4.4 Summary: (Un)controlled competition

Each of the three discussed aspects of competition on the platform highlights consequences of the self-regulating system that Finn Småjobber offered to its workers. Firstly, by not monitoring

the workers that joined the platform, and how much they used the it, Finn Småjobber maintained a steady stream of workers joining the platform. However, that also meant that more professional actors were able to use of the platform and take on “small jobs”, in competition with non-professional “regular” workers. Secondly, the way in which the unlocking of jobs was structured, where helpers and job owners could interact with each other before the job was assigned to a worker, resulted in several instances where both the job owner and workers themselves engaged in underbidding and haggling, which essentially always were advantageous for the job owners – the workers were competing on a buyer’s market. Lastly, as the interactions and transactions on the platform were not monitored by Finn Småjobber, and were in theory therefore open to all who paid, actions to prevent discrimination were not the responsibility of the platform, but the job owner. These are all consequences of the action space that the platform constituted, as choosing not to control something is also a form of control.

7.5 Overrated ratings?

As discussed in section 3.3.6, the use of techno normative control mechanisms such as ratings is generally perceived to put pressure on workers. As the workers know their performance will be rated, and ratings are important for getting new jobs, they internalise this control in their work (Gandini, 2019; Rosenblat & Stark, 2015). This aspect was to some degree also present among some of the workers I interviewed, but not to the extent that the literature might suggest.

Karen expressed that it was important to get good ratings from job owners: *“It was a bit important that they gave me good ‘reviews’, so that I could get new jobs.”* When asked if ratings were on her mind while working, she replied: *“I would have never taken a job and then done a poor job. It was mostly a few hours of work, you wanted to do it properly”*. George also admitted he had thought about ratings while working: *“It was probably in the back of my mind, that I wanted the people to be satisfied with the work I did. That way they might want to call me if they needed anything else done.”* For him, in addition to getting good reviews, doing a good job could potentially result in further jobs offers from the same job owner outside the platform.

Hans expressed that he thought the rating system worked quite well. He had nevertheless experienced not getting reviews from job owners after he had done jobs:

Hans: *“I thought the rating system worked pretty well. You got a rating and often a message like ‘thank you for a nice job’. But there were a lot of people that didn’t use it, didn’t bother giving ratings. I thought that was bad on their part. It only took like 10 seconds, and you even got a reminder to rate.”*

Workers and job owners were encouraged to rate each other, but there were no consequences of skipping this procedure. This meant that, no matter how well the worker performed, s/he had no guarantee to get a (good) rating afterwards. Hans admitted that ratings were on his mind while working: *“I’m always concerned with doing a good job, so I wanted it to be as good as possible. But I want people to be satisfied regardless of the rating. People didn’t seem to care that much about the ratings anyway”*.

Lars had similar views and expressed that ratings were not that that important to users. Interestingly, he additionally brought up another aspect; that Norwegians are being too generous with their reviews: *“I didn’t care about ratings. In general, as long as I get a job I’ll do my best. Besides, Norwegians rarely give less than four ‘stars’. We are pretty nice when it comes to giving reviews. Most people had five or four stars.”* This conception coincides with the findings in the report by Berg and Kjørstad, who found that 75 percent of Norwegian users of sharing economy platforms give positive ratings, while only 58 percent gave bad ratings (Berg & Kjørstad, 2017). In fact, if the worker was friendly, only 20 percent of respondents said they gave bad ratings. This makes users aware of the fact that ratings are affected by an underreporting of negative experiences. Interviews with job owners could potentially shed light on to what extent this also was the case in their reviews of the workers on Finn Småjobber.

In sum, workers perceived ratings to be of some importance, but did not experience that this put pressure on them or had a negative impact on their work. Several of them stressed that they would have wanted to do a good job regardless of the ratings. Moreover, the design of the platform did not force users to rate each other, with the consequence that workers experienced not receiving ratings even if they did a good job.

The previously mentioned point made by both Frank and Hans – that it was highly advantageous to be the first one to unlock a job – also opens up to the discussion on how important good ratings actually, in terms of “winning” jobs: The impression that whoever unlocked the job first got it, begs the question if job owners focused more on getting the job done quickly, than

necessarily getting the highest rated worker. Gandini has argued that the use of techno-normative control mechanisms such as ratings, represents a qualitative intensification of the labour process (Gandini, 2019). From what I found in my interviews, these control mechanisms did not seem to have the intensifying effect on workers as one might have expected. However, as this study has not looked into different experiences based on different types, is the possible that the importance of ratings for getting jobs could differ between types of jobs.. Frank and Hans for the most part did various moving jobs and trash disposal. It would be interesting to see if other types of jobs would lead job owners to focus more on ratings, for instance more traditional domestic work like cleaning or care.

7.6. Janus-faced flexibility

In sections 3.3.7 and 6.6.7 I have previously discussed aspects of flexibility and risk on labour platforms, and on how Finn Småjobber sought to control the distribution of this. In this section, I will discuss aspects of risk and flexibility that came up during my talks with workers, to give a nuanced description of how different aspects of flexibility and risk was perceived by workers using the platform.

7.6.1 Freedom and flexibility – for whom?

Workers themselves brought up and highlighted flexibility as one of the best things about Finn Småjobber. For Karen, the possibility to choose when to work was the most positive aspect of the platform:

Lars: *“I thought it was fun. You were completely free, you didn’t have to work if you didn’t want to. It was very diverse, especially when I travelled so much. If you are only going to be in Norway for a month, then you could work there. In that case you wouldn’t have time to work other places[...] It was an easy way to get money. You didn’t have to work for too long before you had made a couple of thousand NOK.”*

Lars expressed similar thoughts. For him, it was the freedom to try new things that was the most positive:

Lars: *“For me, it was really fun to do stuff I had never tried out before, find my own solutions to problems. It was like ‘here’s a problem, do whatever you want as long as*

we are happy'. You had freedom in the way you worked, in relation to employers and in choosing when you wanted to work".

Flexibility as a positive aspect of platform labour is emphasised by workers in similar studies. In his study of Uber Black in Norway, Oppegard found that drivers expressed similar views on the flexibility and freedom that the platform offered (Oppegard, 2018). In her study of Foodora-couriers, Jesnes found a similar pattern; couriers expressed enjoying the freedom and flexibility that the platform offered, where workers could decide their own schedule by tagging themselves as (un)available for work two weeks in advance (Jesnes & Oppegard, 2020). However, Jesnes also found that this flexibility was constrained by the platform's need for workers to work unsocial hours such as evenings and weekends, as the platform had set up its payment system to pay more during these hours.

On Finn Småjobber, workers were not pressured or incentivised by the platform to work at any specific hours, as it was up to the workers and job owners to make arrangements. Thus, workers did not need to provide scheduled hours to the platform, and could themselves decide when to work. In contrast, workers on the small job platform Luado, workers have to update their schedule in the app to show when they are available (Luado, n.d.-b). Regardless of whether workers must provide a schedule or can choose more freely, as workers on Finn Småjobber could, they must still adapt their working hours to fit with the job owners needs and wishes.

Importantly, as outlined in section 3.3.7, flexibility, risk and fragmentation can be seen as different aspects of the same phenomenon, the point being that with increased flexibility comes increased risk. Several of my informants implicitly stated that the risk sharing between workers and job owners was unbalanced. Frank pointed out that the flexibility on the platform was clearly in favour of the job owner:

Frank: "It was flexible for the ones that posted jobs. They could just type in what they needed and see if someone could do it, and then pick the one they wanted. If it was flexible for me? Well... for me it was just a message board where you bought contact info".

This is an interesting statement, as it reflects on how flexibility is often unequally distributed between workers, customers and platforms. According to Frank, the flexibility on Finn

Småjobber was mostly on the job owner's side, and the platform in essence did not offer much more to him as a worker than the flexibility to buy contact information.

Hans shared similar thoughts, and expressed frustration with unserious job owners that took on little risk when posting jobs:

Hans: *“There were a lot of people that removed their jobs from the platform, and unserious people that posted jobs. That was a big frustration.[...] The people that posted jobs didn't have to pay anything. That was [also] very frustrating, they were never financially injured in any way. There were no consequences if they cancelled a job.”*

Me: “Was this normal, that people didn't respond or cancelled?”

Hans: *“Yeah I would say so. It got very frustrating, it felt like you were wasting your time.”*

There were also instances where workers unlocked jobs that had already been assigned to others, without being marked by the job owner as completed on the platform. Finn Småjobber did not charge job owners for posting jobs, but workers were forced to have a buy-in. If the job owners then removed jobs or did not mark it as finished, workers lost the money they paid. This illustrates well how the information and power asymmetries on platforms work (Oppegard, 2018; Schmidt, 2017).

Hans also had critical remarks on how the subscription model benefitted Finn Småjobber at the expense of workers:

Hans: *“I guess it was a pretty good business for Finn, you know, five or six people that unlocked a job, and only one got it. I thought it was pretty ridiculous, this only went to the advantage of Finn. You could risk using 400–500 NOK without getting jobs, it was like throwing money out the window, That was one of the reasons why I started finding jobs through Facebook.”*

As discussed in section 6.3, the platform framed subscriptions and unlocking payments as a strategy for assuring workers that contacted job owners were serious; Through their “buy-ins”, workers showed that they were invested in the jobs. However, as illustrated in this section, the same demands were not put on the job owners, who could post and remove jobs without any potential risk. This in turn increased the risk and frustration that workers faced, as they could never be sure if the job they unlocked was not already assigned. Thus, we can conclude that,

although the workers appreciated the freedom and flexibility Finn Småjobber had to offer, they were also frustrated with how they also had to carry more of the financial risk involved in the transactions.

7.6.2 Bypassing the platform

Finn Småjobber was aware of the potential risk of workers bypassing the platform, as discussed in section 6.6. As a result, the platform chose to charge workers when they unlocked jobs, and did not take a fee from transactions. However, workers described other ways in which the platform was bypassed. First, Karen and Lars both said they had taken on jobs where they ended up getting paid more than what was initially agreed upon. As Finn Småjobber did not get a cut of payments, they did not gain from workers getting higher payments. The fees to unlock jobs were algorithmically adjusted relative to the listing price of a job – the higher the listing price, the higher the cost to unlock, up to a maximum fee of 95 NOK. When workers then were paid more than the listing price, the platform had already extracted its surplus from when the job was unlocked. Thus, workers reaped all the benefit from the increased payment.

The second way workers bypassed the platform was through word of mouth: Job owners putting helpers in contact with other potential clients outside of the platform. Lars, as an example, was assigned a job on the platform, where the task was to build a shed. When it turned out that the job was somewhat bigger than initially described, the two parties agreed upon 7000 NOK instead of 6000 NOK for the job. Note that the adjusted payment exceeded the 6000 NOK limit of the platform. Later, Lars was then contacted by a friend of this job owner, who offered him a similar job. George did also have a similar experience, getting contacted by a friend of someone he previously had worked for. Although this was not something that occurred often, it nevertheless illustrates one of the possibilities workers had as a result of the flexible platform model: As they were not employed by the platform, they were free to benefit from activity that came out of the initial work on the platform, effectively bypassing Finn Småjobber when it was possible.

7.6.3 Risky business? The potential cost of freedom

As previously discussed, Finn Småjobber was not involved in the interaction between the worker and the job owner, once contact had been established between the two. This meant that workers and job owners themselves had to manage payments directly. The workers I interviewed had predominantly received payments through the mobile payment application

Vipps, but some payments were also made in cash. This illustrates how different platforms can benefit from each other: The popularity and widespread use of Vipps also benefits platforms such as Finn and Finn Småjobber.

As Finn Småjobber did not control the payments, workers took the responsibility and risk of potential problems that might occur. However, workers expressed that getting payments had not been an issue. For instance, Karen, Lars and Nina the payment processes like this:

Karen: *“A lot of it was through Vipps, and one got paid after the job was done. When I looked out for a dog I was paid in advance. I never experienced anyone not paying [...] I only experienced that a person paid me extra at one point. Most people were just thankful that someone could do the job that they couldn’t. I only met nice people.”*

Lars: *“I got paid cash for singing at a wedding. Other than that, I was paid through Vipps. I never had any problems with payments, I know where they [the job owners] live and have worked with them, so [pauses] it’s never been an issue.”*

Nina *“The contact was very easy, and we were paid through Vipps.”*

Out of all my informants, Hans was the only one to experience problems with getting paid: *“Payments were mostly done through Vipps, it worked okay. I only experienced not being paid on one occasion. She didn’t pay at all. It was a woman that I had helped out previously, and that time she paid.”* **Me: What did you do then?** *“It was like 400 NOK, so it was limited how much time I wanted to use on it. But I have her name.”* He said he did not bother contacting Finn Småjobber to get help with the problem:

Hans: *“They disclaimed any responsibility, they were just doing the mediation, and didn’t care about the settlements between workers and job owners. They were just a mediation service, you [the worker] had the responsibility to make sure you didn’t make more money than you were allowed, or were doing anything illegal. That was your responsibility.”*

Beyond the potential risk of not getting paid, workers, as well as job owners, ran the risk that something unforeseen – like an accident – could happen during the job. Most workers had not reflected on the potential consequences of what this implied. When asked about this, Frank, Hans and Lars all made similar remarks:

Frank: *“I don’t know. Since the payments didn’t go through Finn then I would assume there wasn’t any insurance. I guess the responsibility was with the private parties. If there would have been a car crash then that would have been settled by who owned the car, if it was rented and stuff like that. If something was broken during the job...I don’t know. I didn’t reflect upon that.”*

Hans: *“You didn’t have any insurance, and Finn didn’t say anything about it. That was also why I stuck to transportation and disposing garbage. It was kind of limited how bad it could get.”*

Me: What if something had happened?

Hans: *“Then I guess I would have had to take the consequences myself, and use my own insurance.”*

Lars: *“I guess I would have had to take the consequences and use my own insurance.”*

None of the workers expressed strong feelings about having to take this risk, but Hans said he felt the platform should have been more involved: *“I thought the distribution of responsibility was okay, but when they charged that much, there should have been more support if something happened.”*

7.6.4 Tricky taxes

As there was no formal employment relationship between the platform and the workers, one consequence of flexibility was that workers were responsible for making sure they stayed within the regulations on small jobs. The workers all knew that the work they were doing was based on a particular set of regulations. However, their knowledge of what these rules entailed varied between workers: Some were well aware of the rules, while others had limited knowledge of them. It also varied among the informants how strictly they cared for or abided by the rules.

Frank said: *“I didn’t give much thought into it, and I think Finn [Småjobber] avoided responsibility by not controlling payments. But I have read somewhere that there are some rules for how much you can get paid, [it has to be] below a certain amount and stuff like that. I thought it wouldn’t be a problem, and that nobody would bother tracing such a small ‘business’ [said humorously] as the one I was running.”*

Karen expressed similar thoughts:

Karen: *“I have been curious about the taxes. I think there was a lot of undeclared work, with such small sums.”*

Me: “Were you cautious about it? Did you look into the rules?”

Karen: *“The amounts were so small that I suspected it would be okay. I thought it would work out, it wasn’t like you became a millionaire or anything.”*

Hans summarised it as follows:

Hans: *“It was a pretty chaotic market, I suspect that there were a lot of people that were pushing the limits of what was legal”.*

Like Karen, George had also been curious about the taxes and even suggested that challenges with the tax rules could have been a reason for Finn Småjobber closing down:

George *“I’ve always wondered about the taxes, you know, what the government thought about all of this[...]On the platform you could be an ‘allrounder’, do different jobs, and people just ‘Vippsed’ you money. No taxes paid or anything like that. That’s probably why they shut it down.”*

George went on to reflect on how the platform was beneficial for him on a personal level, but potentially unsustainable on societal level:

George: *“For me it worked really well. Of course, I understand that it wouldn’t be sustainable in the long run. You have to be able to give back to society, taxes and VATs and that kind of stuff. It would have been hard to live from this in an honest [legal] way. It was more like jobs ‘on the side’, like if you are driving from Bergen to Oslo with an empty car, you can transport a sofa and make like 1000 NOKs.”*

Lars said he had tried to abide by the rules, but admitted he had not been consistent. He had among other things done a job that paid 7000 NOK, above the 6000 NOK limit:

Lars: *“I tried to follow the rules. I ignored it a few times, but that was mainly because I didn’t know the job would pay more. I haven’t paid any taxes on the extra, but I tried to stay within the limits of 6000 NOK per household”.*

The fact that these regulations rely on subjective assessments of when the extent of a workers activity should be classified as a business operation, represents a challenge of ambiguity: Workers on Finn Småjobber themselves had to assess whether they were reaching a point where their use of the platform should be classified as a business. Even Finn Småjobber themselves admitted that it is difficult for the users to know when to pay taxes, and to understand the regulations for workers (Nicolajsen, 2016).

In sum, the responsibility of making sure that all the work conducted through the platform was within the limits of the law, was outsourced to the workers. All of the informants were quite relaxed with regards the rules, and were confident that they would not get in any trouble. Although I have only talked to a limited amount of workers, it is still reasonable to assume that underreporting of excess income and taxes was common practice, as has been seen on other platforms. For example, the Norwegian taxi authority found that nine out of ten Uber Pop drivers had not reported taxes when the service was active in Norway between 2014 and 2017 (Alsos et al., 2017, p. 63).

7.6.5 Summary: Janus-faced flexibility

In sum, these points illustrates the consequences of how differ flexibility and risk was distributed on the platform. In general, workers appreciated the flexibility that the platform offered, but also found several downsides. As the platform operated with an outsourced model where there was no employment relationship between the platform and workers, the latter got both more freedom and more responsibility. By some workers, the distribution of risk between workers and customers felt unfair, as workers had to carry all of the costs involved with getting jobs, while customers had no “buy-in”, and could both enter and leave the market without any financial risks. This lack of customer accountability, also lead to unserious job owners removing jobs and not marking them as completed or taken, a risk workers effectively were forced to take, with no expectations of help from the platform. Some workers expressed that Finn should have taken more of the responsibility when problems occurred, especially considering their financial gain from charging workers.

Workers had not reflected much on the consequences of their increased flexibility. When discussing who would have been responsible in the event of an accident, but several acknowledged that this risk was probably at their expense. The discussions on insurance clearly

illustrates the argument from Jordhus-Lier (2017) that risk, flexibility and fragmentation represents different aspects of the same phenomenon (see 3.3.7). The “freedom” that workers got from using Finn Småjobbers platform, without being committed to them as employees, also meant increased risk: As they were not formally employed by the platform, workers had to bare the risks of both fluctuating labour demands (as in, work and money) and the risks related to accidents or injuries.

It is also interesting that workers did not give much thought or energy into making sure they were following the rules and regulations on small jobs, indicating that there might have been more extensive misuse and under declaring of income. Essentially, this also highlight the problematic nature of these regulations: It is the individual responsibility to assess when their activity is no longer “just” small jobs and should be classified as a professional business. Several workers admitted they did not care much about looking into these regulations, emphasising that the scope of their activity was so limited that they figured it would be okay.

Again it is important to emphasise what was also discussed in section 7.4.4: A more diverse group of informants might have given an even more comprehensive picture of workers experiences. My informants, even the ones that were unemployed, could not be described as being in a desperate situation, although some of them used the platform more out of financial necessity than adventure and experience. The workers that used Finn Småjobber who were in more difficult circumstances, might have experienced this flexibility differently. As Woodcock importantly argues: “[F]or those with relatively little power, flexibility is often experienced as precarity” (Woodcock, 2019).

7.7 Summary: Workers’ experiences

In this chapter I have aimed at answering my second research question: *How did workers experience working through the platform?* Through a comprehensive analysis of what workers shared in the interviews, I have illustrated how Finn Småjobber’s action space shaped the workers experiences, and how workers developed different strategies in order to get jobs.

In general, the workers enjoyed the freedom at flexibility that the platform offered, and the usefulness of the website for browsing and finding jobs. The freedom that the workers found appealing was mostly a consequence of the hyper-outsourced model that Finn Småjobber

sought to implement, as discussed in chapter six. The platform's business model, with subscriptions and unlocks, contributed to commodifying the workers, as they had to outcompete each other for one job at a time. This led to workers having to use a lot of time assessing what jobs entailed, if the pay seemed realistic and fair, and if they found the chances were good that they would get the job if they unlocked it. They also had to perform emotional labour, pitching themselves to potential job owners, to increase their chances of getting picked. My findings illustrate the ambiguity of what labour platforms in general offer to workers: Workers are both free and commodified.

The consequences of this commodification was illustrated in the workers' reflections around the unequal distribution of risk, as workers had to carry more of the potential risks involved in the transactions on the platform. Without a formal employment relation, they had to carry the risk related to accidents, injuries, issues with payments and unserious job owners. They were free to use the platform, but increased risk came as a consequence.

Both the commodification of labour and marketplace bargaining power are important aspects to keep in mind when reflecting on how experiences can differ based on the situation of workers. As discussed in section 4.5.1, I would have benefitted from a broader range of informants. Most importantly I have not spoken to workers with minority backgrounds. Based on findings from studies of other labour platforms, I have been able to make analytic assumptions of how workers from these backgrounds potentially would have experienced the Finn Småjobber.

Throughout the chapter I have shown how the platform's effort to control the labour process – as discussed in chapter six – affected workers. Thus, this chapter has also illustrated the central point of the concept code/space – spaces that are created through the interaction between code and those who use it. As argued in chapter two, I understand labour platforms as distinct code/spaces that have been designed and “coded” with intention, that is shaped and (re)coded by those who interact with(in) the space. This chapter has illustrated how the Finn Småjobber code/space shaped and affected the opportunities and choices of workers.

8. Workers without a platform

Finn Småjobber officially shut down on the 1st of June 2019. As this happened during my research process, I also asked my informants about their thoughts on the platform closing, and what had happened since then. My Michael and Richard from Finn Småjobber were both disappointed that the platform had closed, especially Richard who had worked on Finn Småjobber during its optimistic beginning. When asked why the platform had closed, they told me that it mainly came down to metrics: They did not see a market for the platform expanding enough to justify continuing to keep it running:

Richard: "I'd say that there were a lot of factors that contributed to [the platform] shutting down. One of the things we saw was that the amount of job owners that reused the service was low. The use was consistent, but low. Even if the service had been consistently improved since 2014, that didn't seem to make the users more loyal."

As identified by Schmidt (2017), in order to attract investment and further development, platforms are dependent on being able to grow ("scale' indefinitely"), and this was not deemed possible by Finn and their parent company Schibsted. In general, decisions to close a platform could potentially be affected by whether it is a product platform or a lean platform. A platform that has invested heavily in for instance cars or housing, will have to deal with getting them off their hands, possibly at a loss. In the case of lean platforms, their main asset is the platform itself, and as such the biggest loss for the company is the platform itself. In the case of Finn Småjobber, they had invested time and resources into developing and building a platform, that they eventually chose to close.

After the platform shut down, Michael and Richard had gone on to work on other Finn.no-projects. Hence, the development of the platform could, as in this case, be seen as gaining the company through the experience its employees got, even if the platform was shut down. General trends point towards a dualization in the labour market, with a core of secure, permanently employed workers, and insecure outsiders with atypical contracts (Jesnes & Oppegaard, 2020, p. 22). On labour platforms that does not employ workers, as was the case at Finn Småjobber, the secure core consists of developers and administrators that can be relocated to other projects, while the insecure outsiders – the ones that have been working through the platform – cannot expect the same level of support and security: For the workers that had used Finn Småjobber, the platform simply disappeared.

All of the workers I interviewed expressed that they missed the platform, and that they hoped that it would return. After the platform had closed, several of them were still doing similar types of small jobs, but now had to find the jobs in other ways. George, as an example, had gone back to getting small jobs the “old fashioned way”, by getting them through family, friends and people he had previously done jobs for:

George: *“I can’t remember why I stopped using it at one point, but I have been in several times later to check if they had opened it up again, I still want to do small jobs. I’m sort of living by the word on the street, people know I have a car and can do stuff. That way I get jobs through friends, but that doesn’t amount to that many jobs. I’d really wish that they had opened the site up again, then I would definitely have used it. [Now] I do jobs, and then tell people to spread the word. I did a job trimming some hedges, and then the neighbour came and asked if I could do it at their place as well. ‘Word of mouth’, is that what they call it?”*

For him, the platform had provided an “opportunity to make some extra money on the side easily”: *“That’s why I want it to come back. Then, if I had the time one day I could just take my car, scroll through the page and go around and do small jobs.”*

Frank said that it was unfortunate that the platform had closed: *“It’s a shame it’s gone, cause I’m still interested in doing this kind of stuff. But the [platforms’ business] model didn’t work for me.”* He had not continued to do small jobs through other means, but had registered an account on the small job platform Luado:

Frank: *“I don’t do other small jobs now. I have registered an account on Luado, but I haven’t had time to try out it out yet. It’s a bit more controlled from the business’ side. You set yourself as available and then people can book you. It sounds more safe than to use a lot of money on fees (for unlocking jobs).”*

As previously discussed, he had concerns with the model Finn Småjobber had used, but he also had concerns about the Luado model:

Frank: *“Luado seems very strict, you have to set yourself available at certain hours. It would have been nice with something halfway between Finn Småjobber and Luado. I think I would have preferred Luado’s model when it comes to payments, that you don’t have to pay to unlock jobs.”*

Hans had continued doing small jobs, but he now found them through various Facebook groups:

Hans: *“Yeah, I still do it, but now it’s through different Facebook-groups.”*

Me: *“How is that compared to doing it through Finn Småjobber?”*

Hans: *“It’s pretty similar, the same problems, there are also professional companies that are operating there. On Facebook it’s much more up to you what you want to do. The companies have carte blanche to operate as they want there. The moderators [of the groups] notifies them about the rules, but they still keep going. On a positive note, on the Facebook group you don’t have to pay when people cancel jobs. [However,] there is no way to search through the jobs, no database, so it’s more random.”*

Me: *“Do you think Facebook has replaced Finn Småjobber?”*

Hans: *“Yes, people have moved their activities to other places.”*

An interesting point to note here, is that these Facebook groups also refer to the jobs as “small jobs”, and that group descriptions often use text very similar to the one on Finn Småjobber and the Norwegian Tax Administration’s webpages to describe what small jobs are. It is also interesting that these moderators in these groups are effectively doing unpaid work for Facebook, through controlling and moderating part of the activity on the Facebook platform.

Karen was sad that Småjobber had closed:

Karen: *“I had my profile right up until it closed down. I recall that I was very disappointed that they shut it down. I had used it on and off since 2016. I would probably still have used it today if it still existed [...] I still do small jobs if people contact me. I would have liked it if the site was reopened again. It would have suited me right now, as I am going on a road trip through Norway with a friend. It would have been perfect: we could have taken a break, looked at Finn.no and then maybe made some extra money. That would have been nice.”*

Thus, as the platform closed, the ones that had controlled it went on to other projects, while the “helpers” ultimately had to help themselves to find other ways of making money. The fact that all of the workers expressed that they would want the platform to come back, despite the problems and concerns that was raised during our interviews, is important in at least two ways. Firstly, it shows that the workers, ultimately, preferred having a platform with issues over having no platform at all: they would rather deal with the problems that the platform had than

loose the platform all together. This illustrates that, as platforms rearrange and effectively become dominant in their markets, exiting the platform potentially comes at a higher cost than staying. Conversely, as the workers on low-skill platforms are easily replaceable, some workers exiting the platform in protest does not pose a big enough challenge for the platform to be forced to change. Secondly, the fact that workers want the platform back also shows that workers are still interested in using online platforms to find work in general. The fact that Facebook has become a space where some workers try to find work, illustrates how this phenomenon takes on new, hybrid forms in unexpected ways.

9. Concluding discussion

As digital platforms are increasingly rearranging our interactions and activities, labour platforms provide opportunities and challenges to workers, consumers and the research community. Their impact on the labour market is as of yet limited, but steadily growing (Bajwa et al., 2018). As this thesis has argued, these seemingly placeless, “virtual” businesses have distinct spatial expressions through the places and spaces in which they operate. In this thesis I have aimed at contributing to this understanding by analysing the phenomenon in a Norwegian context, through a case study of Finn Småjobber. I have done this by answering two related research questions: (1) *How did Finn Småjobber seek to control the labour process?* (2) *How did workers experience working through the platform?* By analysing Finn Småjobber as a code/space, designed for concrete purposes, I have shown how the platform’s choices controlled the labour process, and affected the opportunities and experiences of workers.

9.1 How did Finn Småjobber seek to control the labour process?

Finn Småjobber sought to control the labour process through a number of tactics common to labour platforms. By establishing a lean, hyper-outsourced business model, Finn Småjobber was able to limit its direct involvement in the interaction between users on the platform, while still extracting a surplus from transactions. Although surplus extraction is common among all labour platforms, Finn Småjobber did this in an unorthodox way, through their subscription and job-unlocking regime: Where labour platforms usually extract their surplus from payments between workers and customers *after* a job is done, Finn Småjobber charged workers for accessing their labour “marketplace”, and also for unlocking jobs (i.e. contacting job owners). In this way, Finn Småjobber was in essence brokering contact information, through information asymmetries between the platform and its users.

Like many labour platforms, Finn Småjobber purposefully avoided the role as employer. By creating a platform organised around the Norwegian “regulations on small jobs and services”, Finn Småjobber circumvented potential claims of employment responsibilities, as the type of work the platform facilitated and distributed was, by law, not actually work – just “small services”. This way, the platform outsourced the responsibilities and risk normally associated with being an employer, to the workers. Quality control and performance reviews were also outsourced to the users, through Finn Småjobbers rating system.

Whereas most labour platforms utilise different forms of algorithmic management for controlling the platform, this was not a prevalent feature in Finn Småjobber's platform model. Instead of jobs being assigned through algorithmic task assignment, workers themselves had to trawl through the platform to find work. In this aspect, Finn Småjobber was even more outsourced, and controlled less of the labour process than most labour platforms. Importantly, Finn Småjobber viewed the monitoring and quality control of the jobs posted as its primary responsibility, and this moderation was done manually by employees at Finn Småjobber, not through the use of algorithms.

Finn Småjobber did not monitor or screen workers joining the platform. This meant that barriers to enter the platform were low – anyone could make a worker profile. As long as the worker paid for subscriptions and for unlocking jobs, s/he could get access to the jobs on the platform. In this way, Finn Småjobber made it quick and easy for workers to join in, effectively securing a constant supply of on-demand labour power. The platform had what De Stefano (2016) has identified as just-in-time, pay-as-you-go characteristics: Finn Småjobber and the job owners could tap into a just-in-time workforce, and workers were paid on a pay-as-you-go basis, earning money only for the time they carried out jobs, not the time they spent looking for jobs on the platform.

In sum, the platform used well-known tactics common to labour platforms, with some adjustments and tweaks. Importantly, this case study illustrates the complexity of platform labour. Although platforms utilise many of the similar strategies to control and coordinate the labour process, each labour platform will have different tactics and resulting consequences. These differences are, of course, intimately tied to the differences in the form of jobs that platforms seek to commodify. As illustrated in the discussion on specialised and generalist platforms in section 6.2, the work distributed on platforms varies in their complexity and professionalism. As a result, different jobs will result in different control mechanisms from labour platforms.

9.2 How did workers experience working through the platform?

The findings from the analysis of the first research question – how the platform sought to control the labour process – also informed my analysis of the second research question – how workers experienced working through the platform. In line with Finn Småjobber's own view, the

workers I spoke to did not think of the platform as an employer. Instead, they used labels such as “a marketplace”, “a place”, “a portal”, “a communication channel” and “message board”. The workers enjoyed the flexibility and freedom that the platform offered, as it gave them the opportunity to, at least in theory, pick both the time they wanted to work and the jobs they wanted to do. However, the outsourced model that Finn Småjobber had chosen, pushed costs and risk from the platform and job owners, onto the workers. The main concern for the workers was the platform’s business model, where the workers could not unlock jobs without paying, always running the risk that the job could be, or already had been, assigned to someone else. This put workers in a dual position: They were both workers and consumers, essentially paying to access the labour market.

Finn Småjobber’s choice not to control the allocation of labour, forced workers to do unpaid work-for-labour (Recchia, 2020) in monitoring the platform and looking for potential jobs. This in turn resulted in workers competing directly with each other. Once they had identified and unlocked a potential job, they then had to “pitch” themselves to job owners in self-promoting “mini-interviews”, in an attempt to outcompete other workers. This led to workers underbidding each other to increase their chances of securing jobs. This gave job owners the upper hand, as they could push down prices by putting workers offers up against each other.

The workers did also express frustration with the fact that flexibility and risk were unequally distributed between the platform, job owners and workers. Job owners could post jobs without running any financial risk, whereas workers had to pay both to subscribe and to unlock jobs, effectively carrying all of the financial risk involved in the transactions. The way in which Finn Småjobber changed their subscription model does also illustrate the consequences workers face on labour platforms in general: the decentralised nature of platforms, operating primarily in virtual space, opens up to rapid changes in both their business models and layout. The leaner the platform is, the easier it can make changes to its business model. Finn Småjobber made changes to their subscription regime overnight, raising the fees, essentially giving workers the option to either accept the changes and pay more, or stop using the platform altogether.

As the platform to a large extent was self-regulating, i.e. regulated by its users, and a formal employment relationship was non-existing, Finn Småjobber was not responsible for potential problems that workers faced. If workers experienced problems with payments, or people removing jobs from the platform that workers had unlocked, this was ultimately the workers

own problem. As workers were not screened nor controlled, they did also experience competition from what they identified as more “professional workers”, who were not supposed to be using Finn Småjobber according to the platform’s own rules. As the platform in theory was free to utilise for all non-professional workers, some of the workers interviewed in this study said they suspected discrimination against non-Norwegian workers to be widespread on the platform.

Finn.no brands itself as “the market of opportunities”, and in this thesis I have illustrated how Finn Småjobber constructed a distinct action space, that controlled and shaped the opportunities workers had on the platform. As argued by Woodcock, just as in the traditional labour market, “it is not possible to say there is a singular experience of the gig economy” (Woodcock, 2019). Still, the worker experiences that have been discussed in this thesis are, as discussed in detail throughout chapter seven, part of the more general picture of how labour platforms strategies affect workers.

9.3 Disaggregation, outsourcing, commodification

Together, these findings illustrate the synergetic nature of three general tendencies in the labour market: disaggregation, outsourcing and commodification. Finn Småjobber was regarded by both themselves and the workers as a marketplace in the same way as the regular Finn.no marketplace. The workers were “helpers”, utilizing the marketplace to find “job owners” that needed their help: Labour power was a commodity on Finn’s “market of opportunities”. This logic resonates well with De Stefano’s argument that labour platforms and gig work has a tendency to commodify and disguise labour (De Stefano, 2016, p. 478). Usually, providing a service in exchange for money would be regarded as work, but on Finn Småjobber, the labour was framed simply as the act of “helping” someone in exchange for money. This is a good example of how platforms can disguise and diminish the actual work. Putting jobs up on a marketplace in the same way as used items are offered for sale, explicitly commodifies the work, by sidelining it with consumer goods. On a hyper-commodified platform, labour power does not differ from objects – your free time is commodified, and becomes an asset that can be exchanged for money much like an object.

This point is related to what Bajwa et al. (2018) identifies as labour platform’s and gig work’s tendency to disaggregate work into separate tasks – gigs, that can then be outsourced to gig

workers. This in turn increases the dualization in the labour market, by the workers no longer being part of the business' secure core, but is forced to do the same jobs as an insecure outsider. In some sense, *all* forms of traditional labour consists of a constant stream of small jobs. Each individual room painted by a painting firm could be framed as a gig in a hyper-disaggregated labour market. Thus, labels such as small jobs and gigs are in essence both characterising, and contributing to, the disaggregation and fragmentation of full time jobs, rearranging them into smaller parts. It has been beyond the scope of this paper to give a comprehensive analysis of the actual (content of the) jobs on Finn Småjobber. Still, the jobs discussed in section 6.4, illustrate how services such as child care, car repairs, cleaning and carpentry can be disaggregated into small jobs, further commodifying it in the process. It is thus important to critically examine how labour platforms are potentially affecting existing industries by disaggregating what has traditionally been full time jobs into gigs or “small jobs”, outsourcing the risk to workers.

9.4 The prospect of labour platforms in Norway

Informant George used the metaphor of the docks to describe how work was distributed through the platform. Previously, unemployed workers would go down to the docks and stand in line, in hope to get selected for a few hours or a day's work. This metaphor is interesting, as it points out how gig work has been around for hundreds of years. What is new is the use of labour platforms to distribute these services, begging the question if labour platforms are the new, digitalized docks.

All of the workers expressed that they were sorry the platform closed down, and that they wanted it back, preferably with some modifications. After the platform closed, workers had found other ways of getting jobs. Most of them had returned to finding small jobs the “old fashion way”, through acquaintance and word of mouth. Others had stopped doing small jobs entirely, mainly due to the lack of finding a good alternative platform. Hans had started finding jobs through various Facebook groups. In my research for this thesis, I encountered several Facebook groups distributing “small jobs”, most of which used the same regulations as a basis for their terms of use. A suggestion for further research into platform labour, would be to look into how these groups are experienced by workers, and to what degree workers have had experience with other platforms.

Despite Finn Småjobber shutting down, there are still platforms in Norway dedicated to distributing small jobs. Finn Småjobbers biggest competitor Luado is still active and is aiming at expanding: Luado-founder Jarle Naustvik stated in an interview with Norwegian news outlet Finansavisen that the company is planning to distribute jobs for a total of 1 billion NOK by “a few years”, of which Luado will make 125 million NOK (Oreld, 2020). Among other things they have gone into collaborations with Maxbo and IKEA, to offer carpeting and mounting services in collaboration with the two companies (Luado, 2019).

Another platform, Min Småjobb, was launched on the 1st of September 2019, shortly after Finn Småjobber had shut down their platform. This platform is strikingly similar to Finn Småjobber: Job owners can post jobs for free, and workers can contact job owners for a small fee. They do however not use the same subscription model as Finn Småjobber. Instead, they offer two different models for unlocking jobs. On Min Småjobb, workers can either pay only to get contact information in order to chat with the job owner, or they can fully unlock the job for a slightly larger fee (Min Småjobb, n.d.). In other words, workers do not have to pay for subscriptions, but if they choose to pay only to chat with the job owner, they will pay a fee regardless if they are assigned the job or not. This was also one of the main frustrations of worker that used Småjobber: paying and still risking not getting a job. As the small job economy has not disappeared with the closing of Finn Småjobber, an interesting topic of further research, could thus be to contrast the findings of this thesis, with similar studies on Luado, Min Småjobb, small job-Facebook-groups. This way, the nuances of the seven dimensions of platform labour outlined in this thesis would come to good use, offering concrete avenues of comparison.

At the time of finishing this paper, the world is in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and many gig workers have been hit hard by both drops in customer demand due to lockdowns, and increased competition from people joining labour platforms in order to make ends meet (Moulds, 2020; Semuels, 2020). Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict the future, it is clear that the negative effects on the economy are vast. In a few weeks after the Norwegian government enforced restrictions, the unemployment rate rose from 2,3 percent to 10,3 percent of the workforce, mainly due to business temporarily laying people off (NAV, 2020a).

In this regard, another important point is that the economic consequences of the COVID-crisis are not equally distributed. As researchers at the Frish Center, SSB and NAV have found, people with low income, low education and that come from low income family backgrounds have

taken the hardest economic hit (Bratsberg et al., 2020). If we refer back to our previous discussion on marketplace bargaining power, this last group resembles that of precarious workers that have lower marketplace bargaining power in the labour market. As of the 12th of may 2020, 13,9 percent of the Norwegian workforce were either fully or partially unemployed (NAV, 2020b). While these numbers are expected to decline as restrictions are lifted further and we enter a (new) normality, the predictions for the economy are looking bleak both in Norway and internationally. The sharing economy saw it rise in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis (Srnicsek, 2017), and since then the use of this type of platforms has been more established both socially and technologically. The platform economy blossomed in the wake of the financial crisis in 2008. Will labour platforms surge in the COVID-economy? Based on what we already know it would seem likely, but only time and further research will tell.

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Appendix A: Information about project and consent form

Forespørsel om deltakelse i masterprosjektet

”Arbeidsprosesser i digitale arbeidsplattformer”

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i mitt forskningsprosjekt. Formålet er å studere arbeid gjennom digitale plattformer i en norsk kontekst. I dette skrivet gir jeg deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva eventuell deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Mitt masterprosjekt har som mål å studere hvordan digitale plattformer skaper en arbeidsprosess. Med dette menes hvilke virkemidler plattformer tar i bruk, hvordan de er lagt opp, og hvordan de fungerer i praksis. Studien ønsker å kartlegge hvordan plattformers oppbygning og modell fungerer sett fra både plattformdriver og oppdragstakers perspektiv.

Jeg ønsker å intervju deg for å få førstehånds kunnskap om hvordan deres plattform er lagt opp og hvilke valg som ligger bak.

Prosjektet vil utgjøre min masteroppgave i samfunnsgeografi ved Universitetet i Oslo (UiO), som skal leveres våren 2020.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Universitetet i Oslo ved Sondre Thorbjørnsen er ansvarlig for studien, som veiledes av David Jordhus Lier ved Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi (ISS) ved UiO. Prosjektet er også gjort i tilknytning til Forskningsinstituttet Fafo, hvor forsker Kristin Jesnes er biveileder for studien.

Hva innebærer det å delta?

Intervjuet vil ta rundt 45 minutter, og spørsmålene jeg stiller vil handle om blant annet: hvordan plattformen er lagt opp og fungerer, arbeidsrelasjon og arbeidssituasjon, muligheter og utfordringer for digitale arbeidsplattformer i Norge. Tid og sted avtaler vi eventuelt nærmere per telefon. Under intervjuet vil jeg ta notater, og eventuelt gjøre lydopptak for transkripsjon

om du gir tillatelse til det. Både notater og eventuelle lydopptak vil bli anonymisert, og informanter vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i den ferdige oppgaven.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. På siste side i dette dokumentet finner du et samtykkeskjema. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke ditt samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Jeg behandler opplysninger om deg basert på og i tråd med ditt samtykke.

Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Masterstudent Sondre Thorbjørnsen, sondrth@student.sv.uio.no - +47 97772409
- Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi ved David Jordhus-Lier, david.jordhus-lier@sosgeo.uio.no - +47 22854807.
- Kontakt informasjon, UiOs personvernombud - personvernombudet@uio.no

Med vennlig hilsen

Sondre Thorbjørnsen

Masterstudent Human Geography

Universitetet i Oslo

+47 97 77 24 09

sondrth@student.sv.uio.no

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet “Arbeidsprosesser i digitale arbeidsplattformer”, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju
- at mine personopplysninger lagres forsvarlig fram til prosjektet avsluttes

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, ca. 25.05.2020

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix B: Semi-structured interview guide: worker interviews

Short introduction:

Tell about the project

Background

Tell me about yourself

How did you hear about Finn Småjobber?

What made you decide to use it?

Did you have experience with similar work?

About the platform

What was Finn Småjobber?

How would you define a small job? What sort of jobs were posted on Småjobber?

How did Finn Småjobber (the platform) work in practice?

- Making a profile
- Finding jobs
- Unlocking jobs and interacting with job owners
- Communication
- Payments
- Ratings

Experiences

How did you experience working through Finn Småjobber?

What types of jobs did you do?

How did you evaluate your skills for certain jobs?

How did you find jobs/monitor the platform?

How was the competition on the platform?

Where there any particular tactics to get jobs?

Most positive about the platform?

Most negative?

Challenges during jobs? Accidents?

Who were responsible if something happened?

Anything you would like to add?