

6 Research Contexts and Methods

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6.1 A Transdisciplinary and Multi-method Project

To understand how solo self-employed (SSE) workers are currently measured, classified, and represented in different European contexts, transdisciplinary and multi-method research was planned (see Murgia et al., 2020). Different from the idea of interdisciplinarity, where the knowledge from different perspectives is additive, the SHARE project adopted a transdisciplinary approach (see Nicolescu, 1996; Zaman and Goschin, 2010) as a strategy to cross disciplinary perspectives while sharing the same conceptual frame and in the attempt to construct a common theoretical framework. A transdisciplinary project addresses a research question that might only be investigated outside the boundaries of single disciplines.

The analysis of solo self-employment was developed within perspectives and disciplinary areas that have rarely dialogued with each other (see Chapter 1). The characteristics that distinguish subordination from self-employment have always informed debates within labour law, which has in the last decades also focused on the emergence of grey areas between self-employment and salaried work (Perulli, 2003; Supiot, 1999). In recent years, the analysis of freelancers and SSE workers has also become central in studies on employment and industrial relations (Heery et al., 2004; Pernicka, 2006; Schulze Buschoff and Schmidt, 2009), entrepreneurship and innovation (Bögenhold and Fachinger, 2007; Folta et al., 2010), social movements (Choi and Mattoni, 2010; Funke and Wolfson, 2014), as well as in cultural studies (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Bröckling, 2016), and in studies on management and organisations (Barley and Kunda, 2004; McCabe, 2008). As a result of this lively debate and of the recommendations developed by the ILO to adapt current statistical definitions and measurements to changes in global labour markets (ILO, 2018), official labour statistics are also trying to set new standards to identify ambiguous employment statuses in the European context, using in particular data from the European Working Condition Survey (EWCS) (Eurofound, 2013, 2017, 2024; Williams and Horodnic, 2018) and the 2017 ad hoc module on self-employment of the European Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) (Bozzon and Murgia, 2022; see also Chapter 7).

Within the SHARE project, an attempt was made to build a conversation between these different disciplinary perspectives, all of which were approached from the changing experience and representations of workers. The focus on experience in transdisciplinary studies has a long and well-established tradition, particularly rooted in the work of Edgar Morin, who strongly advocated for the need to move away from single disciplinary perspectives, aiming instead to make sense of lived experiences, which can hardly be seized through a single theoretical approach or debate, requiring rather drawing on a whole range of ‘pertinent knowledge’ (Morin, 2001). From this perspective, although more and more difficult within increasingly sectoral and specialised academic systems, the research objective should not be driven by addressing problems, or worse, by ‘filling gaps’ within the agenda of a specific discipline. Our research objectives would be more promising, and perhaps of greater interest to society, if they started from the conditions and representations of the actors directly involved, who navigate, are subjected to, and act upon the phenomena we wish to understand – in this case, individualisation, the lack of rights, and the ability to construct forms of solidarity and collective action within labour relations. Therefore, it is not a matter of creating abstract theoretical frameworks or promoting the agenda of a discipline, but of co-constructing with research participants knowledge that is relevant to make sense of lived experiences as well as the ‘big questions’, which are usually left out of the academic discourse precisely because they are too complex and addressed within multiple and fragmented academic debates.

Within this framework, we developed the three main analytical axes of the project. As far as statistical analysis is concerned, we were not so much interested in analysing the available data as we were in questioning the methods used so far in the main European labour statistics. On the one hand, we consulted national questionnaires to understand what data was collected and how questions were formulated. With the aim of capturing the experiences of workers in different countries, we administered the questionnaires to a number of research participants working in different industries in order to understand to what extent statistics are currently able to identify the heterogeneity of conditions at the intersection of self-employment and employment and to understand what kind of data are available for each country, their comparability, the definitions used, as well as workers’ perceptions of the questions asked. On the other hand, we analysed the main European labour statistics, *i.e.*, the EWCS and the EU-LFS, trying to understand which national specificities are lost in the harmonisation of European statistics, how SSE workers are classified differently in the different surveys, and which types of data would be important to collect to capture the hybrid areas of labour (Bozzon and Murgia, 2022).

Regarding the legal analysis, the SHARE project aimed to understand not only how solo self-employment is regulated in European and national legislation (Digennaro, 2020), but also to analyse the implications for workers as well as the cultural framework in which labour law has developed in

recent decades (Digennaro, 2022). To do so, various national experts were contacted, and the analysis was also informed by several research participants involved in the investigated countries. Also in this case, the attempt was to read European and national regulations through the lens of experience, following what Alain Supiot (1999) was already arguing in the late 1990s – that in order to understand the transformation of work and employment and its future in Europe, legal categories cannot be reconsidered without reference to the changes taking place in practice, hence the need for a dialogue between legal scholars and social scientists.

In the course of our study, the experiences and representations of the subjects were also investigated through an ethnography conducted over a period of four years in six European countries, in constant dialogue with statistical and legal analyses. SSE workers were considered to be emblematic of the deployment of an ‘enterprise culture’ whose effects, in Western countries, are perceived both at the legal-political level and at the organisational and individual ones (Du Gay, 1996; Gorz, 2001; Rose, 1992). In this dynamic – already observed by Michel Foucault (1979) in the late 1970s – subjects tend to perceive themselves as ‘entrepreneurs of themselves’. By celebrating autonomy, risk-taking, and self-reliance, the spread of an enterprise culture has fostered processes of individualisation and contributed to the emergence of enterprising selves, pressured to take full responsibility for all the risks involved in their lives and careers (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bröckling, 2016). Freelancers and SSE workers embody these processes (see Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999), as they represent both the celebration of self-fulfilment and the self-responsibility of the workforce, based on the transfer to individuals of responsibility for all the risks and costs associated with their work (Fleming, 2017; Moisander et al., 2018; Storey et al., 2005). Moreover, we not only investigated how SSE workers represent themselves but also how the representation of their interests is articulated, in an attempt to capture both performative and institutional dimensions of collective representation, emphasising its dynamic and claim-making nature (Pitkin, 1967; Seward, 2014; Meardi et al., 2021). Departing from classical approaches that focus only on institutional representatives, our study also directly involved SSE workers to understand, from their perspective, how despite processes of individualisation, it is possible to create new forms of collective action and organising.

The research approach used in the SHARE project is thus transdisciplinary in that it examined what I termed ‘hybrid areas of labour’ from different angles, which need to be considered simultaneously and in their mutual intertwining in order to understand the phenomenon under investigation. To explore the figure of SSE workers in Europe, we have therefore related: (i) how they are measured, and thus how they are identified and represented statistically; (ii) how they are represented and classified in terms of labour law and social policies; and (iii) the ways in which they represent themselves and the practices they put in place to move away from the representation of individualised subjects in the labour market and build forms of collective mobilisation and organising.

6.2 Methods and Selection of Countries

The project is cross-national in that it compares six selected European countries by conducting a statistical, legal, and ethnographic analysis. A multi-method research design was constructed, involving several methodological approaches that are relatively complete on their own, and then used together to form essential components of a single research programme.

First, the quantitative analysis shed light on how data on hybrid areas of labour – and specifically solo self-employment – are collected in order to understand how these figures are measured and statistically represented (see Chapter 2). Second, the legal analysis showed how, in the six selected countries, the work arrangements of the SSE differ in terms of employment regulation and protection, providing different public (political and legal) representations of them (see Chapter 3). Third, across the six selected countries, a multi-sited and cross-national ethnography (Marcus, 1995; Hannerz, 2003) was conducted, a method particularly suited to the exploration of an emergent and transnational process like the growth of hybrid areas of labour because of its capacity to combine interpretative ‘thickness’ with comparability among different national contexts (see Chapters 9–12). In particular, we position our study within the framework for transnational comparative research in labour studies recently offered by Almond and Connolly (2020), who called for the adoption of a ‘slow comparative agenda’, which implies long-term engagement, as opposed to the ‘thin forms of analysis and limited sociological engagement’ (p. 2) typical of transnational comparative research. Slow comparative research aims to counter the dominant comparative strategies, conceived as an adaptive response to various external pressures, which force researchers to often rely on the voices of institutional representatives only and to analyse transnational dynamics by producing quick and practical answers, as well as concise recommendations, easily transferable across countries, thus neglecting the contradictions and complications that would emerge from pursuing in-depth knowledge of actors, their representations, and practices.

The European countries involved in the research were France, Germany, Italy, Slovakia, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The first criterion used to select the countries was the balance between comparability and heterogeneity between the cases. In terms of comparability, in all selected countries, in 2015, at the time of writing the ERC project proposal, the rate of solo self-employment had increased significantly over the previous 15 years (around +25–30% in France and Germany, +35% in the UK, +50% in the Netherlands, +60% in Italy, and +130% in Slovakia). In terms of heterogeneity, these countries are characterised by different social protection systems with different levels of inclusion of SSE workers. A further criterion considered was the dynamism of the cases, that is to say, the search for countries in which the capacity, albeit limited, to develop forms of collective organising among the SSE had been detected.

Germany and France are usually classified as ‘pure’ conservative welfare systems, but with different strategies concerning women’s employment (Palier, 2010). Within these systems, social security arrangements include different social schemes and programmes that depend mainly on the workers’ status, profession, or sector of activity. Between the mid-1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, non-standard jobs represented almost 20% of the working-age population in France and 30% in Germany (Eurostat, own calculation). The SSE reached between 6% and 6.5% of employment in these two countries, but they had increased by between 25% and 30% in the considered 15 years (Allmendinger et al., 2013). In terms of employment regulation, Germany and France differ substantially in the ways that they manage the SSE. In Germany, the legislation foresees a hybrid legal category for the ‘dependent solo self-employed’ (*Arbeitnehmerähnliche Person*, ‘employee-like person’), which allows access to certain social protection policies normally granted to employees. This is not the case in France, where hybrid categories are not foreseen and special regulations are in place only for certain subgroups of freelancers and SSE workers (Eichhorst et al., 2013). With respect to the ability to develop collective forms of SSE workers’ organising, the two countries also show substantial differences (see Chapter 9).

Italy represents a Southern European welfare system often described as a special case of the conservative system. Differently from ‘pure’ conservative systems, it is characterised by a ‘deficit’ of social policies and a persistent reliance on family support to manage social risks (Ferrera, 1996). The recent partial and targeted labour-market deregulation has enhanced a clear-cut insider/outsider scenario between permanent workers and temporary sub-protected work positions, fostering a generational divide. In the period considered, temporary jobs accounted for 22% of the working-age employed, among whom the SSE was the largest group, representing 15% of the entire employed population. From a legal perspective, Italy is one of the few European countries that has extended certain employee protections to specific self-employment arrangements (Perulli, 2003). Due to the increase of these employment relationships, since the early 2000s, various collective actors have formally included the SSE within their membership, both among trade unions and among employer organisations and SSE associations.

In the Netherlands, the social protection system is often described as a hybrid case that lies between the social-democratic and conservative models (Kammer et al., 2012). Generally speaking, employment policies in this country are close to the social democratic model, while family/social policies adhere to a conservative system (high family allowances with a notable role of part-time work). As a result, the employment situation of a large share of workers can be expected to be relatively flexible and at the same time relatively protected (Bekker and Posthumus, 2010; Bekker et al., 2011). Non-standard jobs represented more than 40% of the employed population in the period under consideration (Allmendinger et al., 2013). The incidence of solo self-employment, in particular, had almost doubled in 15 years, reaching

12% of all workers in 2014. Although the Dutch social security system has experienced a privatisation trend, it still provides the most comprehensive social security for all self-employed (with and without employees) in terms of a basic pension system with universal coverage. In addition, because of the low statutory thresholds, many of the 'bogus self-employed' have access to the same social security system as the employees (Schulze Buschoff and Schmidt, 2009; Dekker, 2010). This feature represents a significant difference from all the other selected countries. In terms of collective organising too, in the Netherlands the long history and high proportion of self-employment are fertile ground for the development of several collective actors on both the workers' and employers' sides.

The United Kingdom is an example of a liberal welfare state characterised by passive labour market policies, residual social policies, and a relatively small public sector. It shares with Italy high market inequalities and low/residual welfare redistribution when compared with conservative (and social democratic) welfare systems. But, differently from all other systems, the UK labour market is neither highly regulated nor highly coordinated. In 2015, non-standard workers represented about 28% of the employed population, and the SSE represented 12%, having increased by more than 30% in the considered 15 years. SSE workers are usually included in the general (residual) protection system. However, they cannot benefit from all allowances that are not means tested, nor from protection against unfair dismissal, redundancy compensation, or guaranteed pay (Pedersini and Coletto, 2010). As in other deregulated institutional regimes, there are many examples of trade unions organising the SSE and other SSE associations were also identified when the research design was developed.

Finally, Slovakia's social protection system has shifted from a universalistic approach to a residual social system. The Slovak welfare state has developed towards a hybrid system that combines elements of conservative-corporatist (pension system), social-democratic (minimum income), and liberal systems (labour-market regulation) (Fenger, 2007). Labour-market policies have been substantially reformed over recent decades. The Slovak labour market has been characterised by a consistent flexibilisation process aimed at reducing the chronic unemployment of the 1990s. This process has been accompanied by large cuts in unemployment benefits and incentives for labour-market participation. Slovakia was characterised by the largest growth of SSE workers among European countries between 2000 and 2014 (+130%), and, in 2014, the SSE represented 12% of the employed population. Differently from all the other selected countries, in Slovakia, at the time of writing the project proposal, trade unions and employer organisations were dealing only in a limited way with the topic of solo self-employment. However, conflictual industrial relations were starting to translate into collective actions, stimulating a new phase in which precarious labour became once again the priority instead of wage increases (Kahancová and Martišková, 2013).

6.3 The Rationale of Cross-National Analysis

The research in the six selected countries was carried out mainly between 2018 and 2021.

The statistical analysis was conducted to understand national logics in the construction of LFS with respect to hybrid areas of labour. Moreover, aggregate public data were used to describe trends in self-employment across the six countries in the last 15 years. As illustrated in Chapter 2, the SSE are variously distributed in Europe, but all countries showed growth among women, late-career, and migrant workers. Moreover, the relationships between subjective well-being, career prospects, and emerging work arrangements (e.g. dependent and involuntary self-employment or hybrid entrepreneurship) were analysed (see Chapter 7).

The legal analysis focused on how subordinate employment and self-employment are classified in the six European countries studied. As illustrated in Chapter 3 (see also Digennaro, 2020 and Chapter 8), in the Netherlands and Slovakia there is a clear-cut dividing line between the contract of employment and forms of self-employment. Germany and the United Kingdom crafted a *tertium genus* that aims to cover, with some guarantees, economically dependent SSE. France and Italy extended the scope of labour law over categories of formally SSE workers who show vulnerability. Despite these differences, all the countries analysed share the fact that the definitions in use in labour law are different from those used for national social protection systems.

The qualitative cross-national ethnography was conducted in all six countries, mainly in the capital cities (except in the Italian case, which started in Rome but then focused mainly on Milan, where SSE workers are most concentrated), and it aimed to understand how SSE workers represent themselves and how they can break their isolation and develop practices of collective organising. More specifically, it was structured in two main phases. In the first, carried out in 2018 and 2019, we identified the main collective actors to which SSE workers belonged, taking into account all industries and including both jobs considered low-skilled and those considered high-skilled. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were conducted with a range of collective actors, the more institutionalised, such as trade unions and employer organisations, as well as hitherto less studied actors, such as SSE associations, freelancer cooperatives, plus grassroots, and self-organised groups. Below is a list of the collective actors approached.

France

Trade unions

Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT)

Confédération française de l'encadrement-Confédération générale des cadres (CFE CGC)

92 *Hybrid Labour*

Confédération générale du travail (CGT)
Force Ouvrière (FO)
Union syndicale Solidaires

SSE associations

Union des auto-entrepreneurs (UAE)
Fédération Nationale des auto-entrepreneurs et microentrepreneurs (FNAE)

Employer organisations

Union des entreprises de proximité (U2P)

Freelance cooperatives

Smart
Grands Ensemble

Grassroots groups

Collectif des Livreurs Autonomes de Plateformes (CLAP)

Germany

Trade unions

Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft (ver.di)
Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB)
Industriegewerkschaft Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt (IG BAU)

SSE associations

Verband der Gründer und Selbstständigen Deutschland e.V. (VGSD)
Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Selbstständigenverbände (bagsv)

Employer organisations

Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände e.V. (BDA)

Freelance cooperatives

WeiberWirtschaft
Smart

Italy

Trade unions

Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL), section NIdiL and association Apiqa
Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL), association vIVAce!
Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL), section Networkers

SSE associations

Associazione Consulenti del Terziario Avanzato (ACTA)

Employer organisations

Coordinamento Libere Associazioni Professionali (CoLAP)

Confassociazioni

CNA Professioni

Freelance cooperatives

Doc Servizi

Smart

Grassroots groups

Deliverance Milano

Camere del Lavoro Autonomo e Precario (CLAP)

The Netherlands

Trade unions

Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging Zelfstandigen (FNV Zelfstandigen)

Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond (CNV)

Vakcentrale voor professionals (VCP)

De Unie

SSE associations

Platform Zelfstandige Ondernemers (PZO)

Zelfstandigen Zonder Personeel Nederland (ZZP Nederland)

Vereniging van Zelfstandigen Zonder Personeel (VZZP)

Werkvereniging

Zelfstandigen Bouw

Freelance cooperatives

Broodfonds

Smart

The United Kingdom

Trade unions

Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union
(BECTU)

Equity

Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), museums section
Unite, construction section
Community

SSE associations

Independent Professionals and the Self Employed (IPSE)

Freelance cooperatives

Coop-UK
Indycube

Grassroots unions

Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB)
Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

Slovakia

Trade unions

Konfederácia Odborových Zväzov Slovenskej republiky (KOZ)
KOVO
Integrovaný Odborový zväz (IOZ)
UniJA

Employer organisations

Slovenský živnostenský zväz (SŽZ)
Slovenská živnostenská komora (SŽK)
Slovenská asociácia malých a stredných podnikov a živnostníkov (SAMP)
Združenie mladých podnikateľov Slovenska (with the official name in
English Young Entrepreneurs Association of Slovakia and the abbrevia-
tion YEAS)
Slovak Business Agency (SBA)

SSE associations

Foundation Nová Cvernovka (NC)
Association of Creative Workers (AK)

Coworking spaces

Coworking Cvernovka
Connect Coworking

In this first phase, access to the fieldwork was facilitated through previously existing relationships and by the fact that, during the empirical research, ethnographers were hosted by local universities and research centres interested in the multiplication of hybrid areas of labour between employment and self-employment: Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire pour la Sociologie

Économique (LISE) in Paris; Re:Work Research Centre of the Humboldt University in Berlin; Fondazione Di Vittorio in Rome; the Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI) in Bratislava; the Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS); and King's College University of London. This also favoured making valuable contacts with expert statisticians in LFS as well as with labour lawyers with whom we could exchange views and who could help to grasp the national specificities of the areas of labour at the intersection of self-employment and employment.

After reconstructing the frame within which the different collective actors composed of SSE workers and/or engaged in their representation were operating, the second phase of the qualitative research focused on specific case studies, trying to consider as much as possible the range of actors mapped in the first fieldwork. Thus, in each country, practices of collective organising developed within trade unions, employer organisations, and SSE associations, as well as in grassroots and self-organised groups, were studied. More specifically, this second part of the qualitative research was conducted mainly in 2020 and 2021, with some short fieldwork in 2022. In each country, the practices of organising of three collective actors were studied, selected according to the following main criteria: the dynamism of collective activities, the geographical coverage of the collective actions, and the media relevance in the public debate. Below is the list of our case studies by country:

France

Trade union: Syndicat National des Artistes Plasticien·nes-CGT (SNAP-CGT)

SSE association: Fédération Nationale des auto-entrepreneurs et microentrepreneurs (FNAE)

Grassroots group: Collectif des Livreurs Autonomes de Plateformes (CLAP)

Germany

Trade union: ver.di Selbstständige and ver.di art and culture

SSE association: Verband der Gründer und Selbstständigen Deutschland e.V. (VGSD)

Self-organised group: Syndicat Helpling

Italy

Trade union: NIDIL-CGIL and Apiqa/Council of Profession

SSE association: Redacta, part of the Associazione Consulenti del Terziario Avanzato (ACTA)

Grassroots group: Deliverance Milano

Slovakia

Trade union/Professional association: Slovenský živnostenský zväz (SŽZ)

SSE association: YEAS mobile app for the self-employed

Self-organised group: groups of workers suing the employer for false self-employment

The Netherlands

Trade union: Kunstenbond

SSE associations: The Orde van Registrertolken envertalers (Orde); Nederlands Genootschap van Tolken en Vertalers (NGTV); Vereniging Zelfstandige Vertalers (VZV); SENSE – Society for English-language professionals

Self-organised group: Dancers' Council, and BIEB3000

The United Kingdom

Trade unions: Equity and Community

SSE association: Independent Professionals and the Self Employed (IPSE)

Grassroots union: Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB)

Having already conducted two years of research in 2018 and 2019, it was possible to continue our activities, albeit remotely, even during the months of lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The category of SSE workers was, moreover, particularly active at that juncture, also because, in most European countries, they were not initially included among workers to whom economic support was allocated during 2020. Also in this case, data collection and local contacts with experts in solo self-employment were facilitated by the fact that ethnographers were hosted in the second part of 2020 and in 2021 by local research centres and universities during the empirical research, in particular: LISE in Paris, Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin, CELSI in Bratislava, Amsterdam Institute for AIAS, and the Social Policy Research Centre of Middlesex University. As the Italian fieldwork was mainly in Milan and the SHARE project moved from the University of Leeds to the University of Milan at the end of 2018, there was no need to activate other institutional collaborations in Italy.

During the data collection phase, researchers participated in both public and, when feasible, private meetings, co-working spaces, public events, demonstrations, and pickets, alongside the formal and informal interviews. We were granted access to a variety of materials intended for both internal and external use, such as annual reports and internal studies. In instances where participant observation was unfeasible, interviews were conducted with members in diverse positions within the collective actors studied. Over the years, our study achieved a comprehensive, formative, and exclusive engagement with the fields and established high-quality relationships with SSE workers and representatives. Field notes and interviews were recorded in English, French, German, Italian, Czech, Slovak, and Spanish and subsequently digitised in English to ensure accessibility for the entire research team. Monolingual texts were shared biweekly via a remotely accessible server, facilitating post-data collection through collective conversations and

reflexivity. Data analysis employed an inductive approach, which involved iterative readings of texts to identify relevant themes (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2013). The relationships within and between the collective actors studied were then analysed to discern patterns of commonalities and differences across countries. The coding process entailed constant dialogue among ethnographers collecting data in different countries. Moreover, the continuous exchange of experiences with the researchers conducting the statistical and legal analyses made it possible to deal with multiple interpretations and collectively discuss emerging paths of analysis.

6.4 The Rationale of the European Analysis

In the last stage of the research, conducted between 2022 and 2023, the focus of the SHARE project shifted from cross-national comparison to the broader European context. The last part of the study was thus dedicated to analysing the ways in which SSE workers are measured, classified, and represented at the European level.

Following the perspectives that conceptualise a survey as a technique to change reality instead of a research tool to attain knowledge of reality in itself (Dewey, 1938), the European labour force surveys were critically revised. In particular, the statistical analysis assessed how the methodologies developed by ILO and EU labour statistics are re-defining the representation of the borders between employment and self-employment. Using data from EWCS, EWCTS, and the 2017 EU-LFS ad hoc module, we tested how different measures of economic and operational dependency, and the conditions of the involuntary self-employed and multi-job holders, affect subjective well-being, job satisfaction, and job perspectives (see Chapter 7).

The legal analysis showed instead the continuity between neoliberal schools that had a role in making the EU legal order and the concepts of ‘working activity’ and ‘undertaking’ elaborated by the EU Court of Justice (Digennaro, 2022; see also Chapter 8). Moreover, two documents developed by the European Commission were also analysed: the Guidelines on the application of Union competition law to collective agreements regarding the working conditions of SSE persons and the Directive on platform work (see Chapter 14). Regarding the latter, we were able to examine three versions of the EU Directive on platform work released by the Commission, the Council, and the Parliament. The final version was adopted by the European Parliament in April 2024. As the SHARE project was already concluded, the last version was analysed through a documentary analysis and discussion with research participants with whom we were still in contact at the time of writing this volume.

Finally, the practices of organising developed by self-employed associations, trade unions, grassroots groups, and cooperatives at the European level were also analysed (see Chapter 13 on transnational alliances). The interviews were conducted both in Brussels and remotely. In particular, as

far as trade unions are concerned, the organisations that were approached and within which at least one interview with a representative was conducted are, first, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and its most active members in the policymaking processes, such as the International Federation of Actors (FIA), the European Federation of Trade Unions in the Food, Agriculture, and Tourism (EFFATT), the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), and Uni Europe, representing workers in the services sectors. Second, interviews were also carried out within the global union Uni Global, mainly focused on the service economy. Moreover, we reconstructed the experience of the European Forum of Independent Professionals (EFIP), which at the time of the fieldwork had evolved into a network of different collective actors organising the European Freelancers Week. Regarding the EU Platform Work Directive, key experts, activists, officials, and staff members within two further networks of organisations were also interviewed. The first was the coalition of platform workers, grassroots unions, and activist groups organised in the Transnational Federation of Couriers and the International Transport Workers Federation. The second involved the European confederation of industrial and service cooperatives (CECOP), which also includes the freelance cooperatives studied in the SHARE project. Therefore, in addition to the scientific return of research findings, the SHARE project also discussed its results with collective actors and policymakers not only at national but also at European level. Indeed, using a transdisciplinary approach aims to contribute not only to the construction of knowledge but also, and above all, to social change. In this perspective, throughout the project, we endeavoured not to confine our research results – described in the following chapters – to the academic debate only, taking every opportunity we had to share our work and to participate in the activities of SSE workers and collective actors who were involved in our project.

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