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On the tragedy of sharing and the “uberization” of the collaborative economy. Towards an understanding of countermovement dynamics.

Working paper written for International Conference at Johannes Kepler University (Linz, Austria) *A Great Transformation? Global Perspectives on Contemporary Capitalisms*, January 9th -13th, 2017.

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“Undoubtedly, our age will be credited with having seen the end of the self-regulating market”

Polanyi (1944:148)

1. Sharing is Back - Introduction

September 2015 brought a set of protests in multiple locations around the globe – these are the starting point of this paper: protests of taxi drivers against the operations of Uber, a San Francisco based online transportation network company. Numerous times, Uber has been and keeps being referred to as a flagship example of the sharing or collaborative economy, which is broadly defined as a range of digital platforms and offline activities centered on the highly contested concept of sharing (Schor, 2014). Amid its diversified offer (including e.g. B2P on-demand deliveries, food deliveries, corporate transportation services), the company provides urban ride-sharing services operating on an easy app solution – UberPOP. With a striking resemblance to what a regular taxi can provide, UberPOP is in strong competition with taxi industries in countries of operation – that meaning over 66 countries and over 520 cities around the globe (Uber, 2016). The company has been successfully entering a market after a market, meeting with different forms of resistance in most of the cases: be it from the side of taxi unions, consumers, or UberPOP drivers themselves.

In September 2015, taxi drivers in Italy, Poland, Belgium, Australia, Brazil, Canada and the UK decided to openly fight against what they have seen as unfair competition. Most of them took it to the streets, blocking cities and loudly calling for each nation state to protect the usually highly regulated taxi industry. They see Uber as a threat to their livelihood through providing taxi transportation for lower prices, with no adherence to the rules that govern the industry. To counter such claims, Uber would for example use the definition of their business model as being a platform that connects the wants with needs (Alderman, 2015), and requesting a fee for this service rather than for the actual transportation service performed by the drivers.

Poland and Warsaw can serve as a particularly interesting example to take a glimpse into, showing how multi-layered the emerging conflict is. Here, the existence of UberPOP

since August 2014 has been gradually creating social unrest and tension that manifest themselves in e.g. organized acts of aggression and physical attacks on Uber drivers, including ambushes of taxi drivers against their UberPOP competitors in remote locations on the outskirts of the city. Curiously enough, the day after the protest brought an impressive 200 percent increase in UberPOP rides ordered (Grodzicki, 2016), expressing the users' voice supporting Uber drivers, and, perhaps, their satisfaction with the lower ride fees. Cases of deliberate destruction of cars as the most valuable possession in this context proliferate – recall, for example, the spilling of tar on the front window panes of cars owned by Uber drivers (Grodzicki, 2016). The situation is evolving and taking new directions. December 2016 brings the first protest of UberPOP drivers in Warsaw as their reaction towards too low wages and too high fees that the company claims after each ride (Grabiec, 2016; Łazarczyk, 2016).

How can we learn from these events? What can they tell us about contemporary capitalism(s), particularly in its cyberspace of platform capitalism? And, finally, what would Polanyi possibly have to say about such developments? In this paper, I suggest a theoretical lens for exploring the dynamics of the sharing or collaborative economy in recent years, set in the context of socio-ecological transformation. As discussed further on, the sharing economy, initially heralded as a potential alternative to the currently dominant free-market capitalism, draws visions of open, participatory, collaborative, cooperative, and resource-considerate societies, redefining how we consume, produce, and interact. Such visions are having problem with standing the test of time in the face of the so-called “Big Sharing” – or the commercial/economic framing of sharing and collaborative practices – with US-based Uber, AirBnB, or TaskRabbit as most prominent examples. These examples are significant not only for the co-optation of the sharing economy, but also for the role of progressing platform capitalism for the developments of the “liberal utopian project”, to use Polanyi's (2001:[1944]) words.

In what follows, I propose a three-pronged theoretical lens that refers to the work of Karl Polanyi (1944 and 1977), Dani Rodrik (2010), and Mark Blyth (2012). It combines Rodrik's political trilemma of the world economy with Polanyi's considerations on freedom, countermovements, and commodification, to finally be complemented with the question of (economic) ideas in institutional change processes, as captured by Mark Blyth. Emphasis on ideas brings Polanyi's (1977) thoughts on the meaning of the economic and his substantive definition thereof to the fore. The paper continues with an attempt of understanding the dynamics triggered by the ride-sharing platform Uber through the outlined theoretical lens. In the conclusion, I invite further contributions to this topic of research and draw possible areas worth exploring. Emphasis on ideas, for example, opens the door to a discursive institutional analysis (Schmidt 2008 and 2011). With the proposed approach, I aim to support the claim of e.g. Novy (2016) who sensitizes us to the need for a critical understanding of developments that further commodify and marketize, thereby strengthening the mainstream and taking us away from concepts such as eco-solidarian development. Or, coming back to the focus of the paper, from sharing and collaborative practices in their visionary reading.

2. Setting the Stage – Theoretical lens

2.1 Pillar One: Polanyi, Institutions, and Change

In *“The Great Transformation. The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times”* (Polanyi, 2001[1944]), Polanyi brings a comprehensive and rich account of socio-economic crisis at its peak in 1920s and 1930s, leading to a threatening demise of democracy in the World War II. In reaching this peak, the emergence of economic liberalism or industrial capitalism in 19th century Great Britain, and the Marginal Revolution in economic thought were essential for spreading the self-regulating market mantra and building its dominance. This process necessitated a violent “disembedding” of markets, and a separation of social institutions, or divorcing the economic from the political. In its new form, the relations in question changed dramatically to a hierarchy built on an overall subordination to the market. Fictitious commodification (i.e. creating “self-regulating markets” in land, labour and money) resulted in distorting communities and social bonds, abusing nature, and destroying livelihoods (Polanyi, 2001[1944]).

Polanyi equated the progressing liberal capitalism to a “utopian experiment”, reinforced by a separation of in fact inseparable institutions: society and the market. In a meta-perspective, the crisis that Polanyi analyzes stemmed primarily from the “attempt to construct societies on the back of utopian economic ideas” (Holmes, 2014: 537), namely: the idea of self-regulating market, subject merely to supply and demand. Polanyi stood very firmly against seeing self-regulating markets as part of the “natural order”. If the economy is to be analyzed as an institutionalized process, then capitalism (or the “market society” in Polanyi’s terms) is to be viewed “through a highly specific cultural fact: the fiction of the self-regulating market” (Maucourant & Plociniczak, 2013). Here, it is crucial to recall Polanyi’s take on the meaning of the economic. In *The Livelihood of Man* (1977), he explains how economic, as used in describing human activity, embraces two fundamentally different meanings: formal and substantive. The former builds on the logic of the means-ends relationship and the resulting “scarcity definition of economic” (Polanyi, 1977: 19). The latter emphasizes the co-dependence of all living things on a given physical environment. The substantive meaning sees the economy as an “institutionalized process of interaction which functions to provide material means in society” (1977: 34). Consequently, in the substantive take, economic phenomena are embedded in society and nature. The formal meaning, with its concern with the allocation of insufficient means to provide for one’s livelihood, can only be justifiable in a context in which market system prevails.

Polanyi (1977) refers to this tendency to equate human economy with its market as the economistic fallacy. This fallacy finds one of its clearest manifestations in the concept of the economic man – a mythical figure in the creation of whom the formal component with the principle of maximization has taken over the substantive, which prevents perceiving him/her as a part of nature, dependent on his/her surroundings. Polanyi traces the fiction of the self-regulating market, accompanied by yet another fictitious assumption of homo

economicus, back to Menger's premises laid down in the second half of the 19th century – the basis for establishing neoclassical school of economic thought.

Since then, the logic of the market has been spreading into various aspects of life in the constant need of new commodity production, as a “market economy” cannot be without a “market society” (Polanyi, 2001[1944: 71-4). Polanyi posits that the spreading of this logic, or the attempt of commodifying everything, leads to multi-level crises as it destabilizes constitutive elements of social life. Many were left behind by the unleashed markets of liberal capitalism. This triggered the creation of a heterogeneous protective countermovement, leading to what Polanyi referred to as a “double movement” between expanding marketization of “true commodities”, and growing restrictions on fictitious ones. The double movement is an arena of social conflict between the supporters of the free-market ideology and social protectionists, where e.g. workers' laws, regulation restricting commerce, and the establishment of central banks were at stake. The resultant tensions are seen by Polanyi as crucial to understanding the uprising of fascism and the tragedy of WWII.

Today, in times overridden by multiple crises (Brand et al. 2013; Maucourant and Plociniczak, 2013) encompassing the world of finance, but also ecology, society, and politics, bringing Polanyi's considerations stronger to the fore has become very attractive. The similarities between the socio-economic and political dynamics are impressive and concerning, especially once looking at the socio-political debates taking a dangerous (nationalistic) right-turn (see e.g. Holmes, 2014; Novy 2016). Brexit and the US elections are big symptoms of an underlying sickness of society and the world: the liberal utopia has reached an unprecedented expression in (hyper)globalization and has yet again lead to an extreme polarization of society. Today, contrary to Polanyi's hopes expressed in the opening quote of the paper, marketization and commodification have gained momentum, as visible in practices of e.g. carbon emission trading in international policy, the care sector, or financial derivatives. Neoclassical economics, with free-market ideology, sealed the superiority of the formal economizing meaning, letting the more substantial meaning of materiality behind. The transformation chronicled by Polanyi continues. Polanyi's insistence on the impossibility of separating the social from the economic and the financial is the key element constituting the allure of re-using his perspective, in a spirit of openness to the current context.

Attempts of analyzing the post-2008 landscape, with its variety of forms of social resistance, many of which are reactions to the imposition of the idea of self-regulating market on a spectrum of areas of life, proliferate (see e.g. Blyth, 2002; Block & Sommers, 2014; Holmes, 2014; Ebner, 2015; Dale, 2016a & b; Novy 2016). As Holmes puts it, developing a sense of:

“the purpose of the economy beyond economism and market-centrism [and] what it might mean to re-embed our understanding of economy within society will be crucial to developing a distinctively Polanyian voice in the post-2008 landscape” (2014:532).

Blyth (2002) discusses two transformations that occurred after the period analyzed by Polanyi. The first is captured in the Bretton-Woods arrangements, and expresses the goal of the opponents of the free market ideology to re-embed the market and strengthen protective regulatory frameworks. The second dates to the rebirth of the liberal creed in the 1970s, and continues till today. It put the neoliberal market fundamentalism on a par with religiously held truths - a process on which the condition of the discipline of economics as currently practiced has a huge impact. In his work on strategies of deglobalisation, Novy (2016) incorporates Polanyian lens to account for the processes of commodification of nature and knowledge. He points out how successful the neoliberal think tanks and media have been in “linking the libertarian utopia of a borderless and coercion-free world with the neoliberal utopia of a universal world market for “everything”, producing ever new “fictitious commodities” (2016: 8).

Both in Polanyi’s and current times, Polanyi’s perceptions on freedom turn to be of crucial importance. In the final chapter of the *Great Transformation*, Polanyi complements his diagnosis of the issues of neoliberal utopia with explaining its faulty approach to freedom. He remarks that conceiving of “a society shaped by man’s will and wish alone” (2001[1944]:266) is, yet again, “the result of a market view of society which equated economics with contractual relationships, and contractual relationships with freedom” (ibid). What he suggests is a view in which guaranteeing freedom in a complex society necessarily requires regulation and protection, rather than equating freedom to lack of coercion. As Polanyi explains, his utopia would require regulation and control, as these “can achieve freedom not only for the few, but for all. Freedom not as an appurtenance of privilege, (...) but as a prescriptive right extending far beyond the narrow confines of the political sphere into the intimate organization of society itself” (2001[1944]: 265). As such, Polanyi refuses to see freedom as essentially free enterprise and free private ownership. He turns to a society that is both just and free, requesting an understanding of freedom as civic rights, leisure, and security; freedom which “gives us all the certainty we need” (1944:268).

2.2 Pillar Two: Dani Rodrik’s Trilemma of the World Economy

Analysing today’s world economy in a post-2008 reality where, as Blyth (2002) explains, the second great transformation of the 20th century keeps the stronghold, Rodrik (2010) tackles the question of global governance. Disappointed with the failure of democracy in fighting poverty and inequalities, he takes a closer look at the current developments of the neoliberal utopia and the free market capitalism in his *The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy*. Building on Polanyi’s perspective, Rodrik (2010:XV) explores economic globalization, starting from showing how “unlike national markets, which tend to be supported by domestic regulatory and political institutions, global markets are only weakly embedded.” Polanyi’s double movement emanates from the trilemma in its variety of contextual settings, enriching Rodrik’s model with more dynamism (Schiering, 2016).

Following the global geo-political scene, Rodrik posits that we are facing “the fundamental political trilemma of the world economy”, with three leading institutional forces of hyperglobalization, nation state, and democracy in interaction (Fig.1):

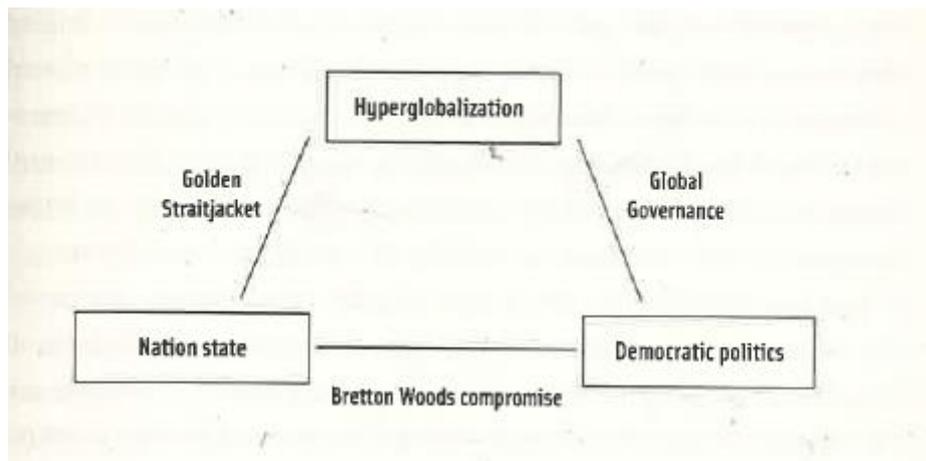


Figure 1: The Political Trilemma of the World Economy (Rodrik, 2010:201)

This figure portrays three channels of fundamental conflict. In solving the tensions between national democracy and global markets, Rodrik (2010:200) points to three options:

1. restricting democracy – consequently minimizing international transaction costs, regardless of the global market’s occasional “side-effects” in various forms of economic and social distress and crisis,
2. limiting globalization – largely dependent on the capacities to build strong democratic legitimacy, and
3. globalizing democracy – with a resultant loss of national sovereignty.

In the trilemma, hyperglobalization, national self-determination, and democracy cannot be at once. Two at most can co-exist: hyperglobalization and democracy necessarily need to limit the nation state. Give the stage to the nation state and hyperglobalization, and you must say good bye to democracy. Equally, strengthening democracy and nation state requires weakening hyperglobalization. Rodrik calls for new and different approaches to globalization, with diversity at its core, rather than singularity of institutional orders or “one economic superpower” (2011:200). Novy takes this thought further and suggests that deglobalization is taking place, and the key questions arise as a struggle about “different forms of selective deglobalisation” (2016: 10). Possible forms spread from deglobalization resulting from international cooperation and *territorialized* (rather than national) social protection systems, to authoritarian, nationalistic and exclusionary deglobalization (Novy, 2016).

2.3 Pillar Three: Ideas matter

Blyth (2002) takes us back to the time where Polanyi’s analysis of economic and political social change left off. Blyth takes the concept of counter- and double movement as his starting point, and builds an analysis of what he refers to as the two *great transformations* in the 20th century: the 1930s and 1970s. He tracks similarities in what characterized these two periods of deep-seated institutional change. In the first transformation, he says, “labor reacted against the exigencies of the market and demanded state action to mitigate the market’s effects by ‘embedding liberalism’ (Blyth, 2002: i). Four decades later, the

1970s brought a strong voice of business - the smallest beneficiaries of this embedding. With the power of those actors, neoliberal creed, based firmly on free-market ideology, took over. As Blyth points out, the contemporary shape of neoliberal economic order is a reinforced attempt to disembed the market from society, this time on a global scale (or even hyperglobal in Rodrik's terms).

Now, this is yet another lens to use while looking into the questions of the current geopolitical order and the undeniable monism in terms of economic policies that feed into this order. What Blyth adds to the picture, though, is his direct addressing of the critical role of economic ideas in enabling and constraining institutional change. Through exploring the relationship between uncertainty, ideas, and interests, Blyth draws an understanding of conditions in which institutional change processes take place. In a similar vein, Schmidt (see e.g. 2008 and 2011) contributes with her discursive institutionalism framework, comprehending the role of ideas and discourse *in* and *for* institutional change. Schmidt and Thatcher (2014)'s work is of particular interest here, as it brings a discursive understanding of what makes neoliberal ideas so resilient. What all of those authors would agree on is that:

“ideas matter because they can actually alter people’s conception of their own self-interest. (...) Ideas, therefore, do not “really” need to correspond to the “real” world in order to be important in this world” (Blyth, 2002:vii).

These remarks immediately brings us back to Polanyi’s utopia of the market society. Directing the spotlight on economic ideas is crucial for institutional change as they provide for the voice of authority in diagnoses of normative framings of e.g. the roots of a given economic crisis, and recipes for fixing it. Moreover, the power of ideas in shaping reality is especially relevant for social sciences “where reality-creating is visible in e.g. the influence of economists on forming and shaping policy making and institutional designs through their advice based on theoretical and empirical considerations” (Gruszka, 2016). In times of crisis, it is therefore necessary to “attend to the economic ideas that key economic agents have” (Blyth, 2002: 10). Ideas, in sum, reduce agent’s uncertainty, prescribe solutions for crisis management, but also empower agents to use their power to construct new institutions.

3. Is Sharing Still Caring? Discussion.

Before my attempt to employ the three building blocks of the approach proposed in the paper, let us take a step back to the starting point: the collaborative or sharing economy. Since 2010 and Botsman and Rogers’ publication *What’s mine is yours*, sharing and collaboration have come into vogue. The proponents paint a vision of a resource-efficient, connected and emancipated society; of decentralization, increased peer-to-peer interactions, and access over ownership; all underpinned with cooperation, collaboration and sharing (see e.g. Botsman and Rogers, 2010; Botsman, 2013; Stokes et al., 2014; Wagner and Kuhndt, 2015; OuisShare, 2015; Shareable, 2015). This vision spoke to many around the world. Decentralized non-profit networks with global outreach, such as French-based OuisShare or US-based Shareable, emerged to actively spread the word on the potential of collaboration and sharing, but also to explore existing ideas and initiatives within that realm, and connect like-minded individuals, groups and communities. In

urban context, the concept of sharing cities came to the forth, strongly driven by Shareable, and relating to the Sharing Paradigm (McLaren and Agyeman, 2015). The Sharing Paradigm proposes a much more comprehensive and holistic approach to understanding sharing and collaboration as evolving practices. It differentiates between inter-mediated and socio-cultural spectrum of such practices on the one hand, and communal/intrinsic and commercial/extrinsic sharing on the other. In their book, as well as city-governance advisory support that they provide, McLaren and Agyeman discuss how such an approach opens possibilities for demonstrating:

“how, with modern technologies, the intersection of urban space and cyberspace provides an unrivalled platform for more just, inclusive, and environmentally efficient economies and societies rooted in a sharing culture” (McLaren and Agyeman, 2015:1).

However, as mentioned in the introduction, the so-called “Big Sharing” (Cohen 2016) or the economic and commercial framing of sharing (McLaren and Agyeman, 2015) have placed collaborative economy under a test: a test in which the utopia of the supporters and their vision is at risk of fading away. The activities of for-profit giants and high involvement of venture capital has put the collaborative economy on a “critical juncture” (Schor, 2014). Many of these activities abuse the rhetoric of sharing (Schor et al., 2015), while being exploratory in nature and built on the mantra of self-interest (Morozov, 2014; Parsons, 2014; Roose, 2014; Eckhard and Bardhi, 2015). Regulatory issues from both consumer and worker perspectives proliferate (Kalamar, 2013; Baker, 2014), as well as cases of reproducing class, gender and racial biases on the platforms (e.g. Hardin and Luca, 2014). Lower resource-use finds little evidence in research, and the commonly quoted environmental benefits often turn to be a truism, especially once taking into consideration the ripple effects and the impact on the economy as a whole (e.g. Schor, 2014; Cohen 2016). Think about AirBnB, for example - does cheaper and better accessible accommodation in each corner of the world makes us fly more to distant destinations? Based on her research, Juliet Schor (2014) would claim so. “Sharewashing” (Kalamar, 2013) is strongly opposed by the involved supportive actors themselves, in an attempt to preserve the essence of their vision. In February 2016, for example, one of the key co-creators of OuiShare, Arthur De Grave, published an article in the French-speaking branch of OuiShare magazine (De Grave, 2016), where he harshly criticizes the commercial hijacking of collaboration and sharing. The title itself, “L’Économie Collaborative, C’est Fini”, along with the photo used (see below) are quite telling about the dilemmas faced by those dedicated to the vision.



Source:
<http://magazine.ouishare.net/fr/2016/02/leconome-collaborative-cest-fini/>

L'ÉCONOMIE COLLABORATIVE, C'EST FINI

ARTHUR DE GRAVE le 16 février 2016

Against such background, taking a closer look at Uber seems alluring. For the sake of making my discussion and points made more concrete and graspable, I will narrow the focus down and use Uber's activities (with the limelight on UberPOP) in France as an example. In essence, the milestones in Uber's French story (see e.g. Alderman, 2015; BBC 2015; Dillet, 2015) are presented visually in the timeline below:

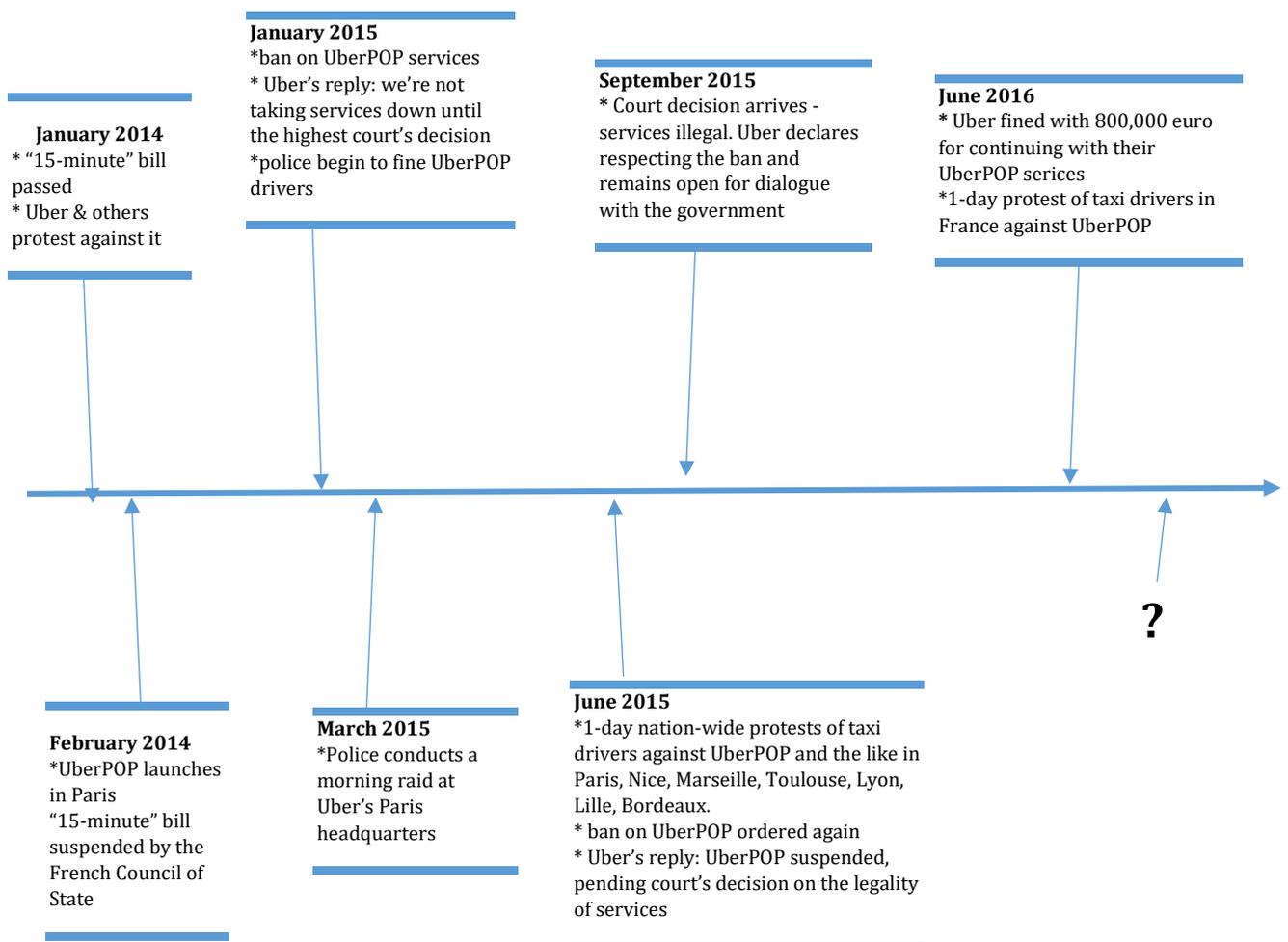


Figure 2: Uber French Timeline

In February 2014, UberPOP was launched for the first time in a European city – in Paris, with an estimated market of 500,000 regular users. Just a month prior to that in

preparation for the launch, a so-called “15 minute” bill was passed, obliging transportation services like Uber to wait 15 minutes before letting a customer in the car. Uber replied by engaging other companies and start-ups that would not benefit from the bill to act and petition against it. The bill did not survive more than a month, as it was declared a potential source of competitive imbalance by the French Council of State. Less than a year after the launching, policy followed the demands of the taxi industry lobbyists by banning UberPOP in France. The company refused to respect the ban, demanding a decision from the Highest Court. The police begun their search for UberPOP drivers in French cities, fining them with up to 5000 Euros – these costs were, in turn, covered by Uber (ref). Investigations into the company continued, with the frustration of the taxi drivers surging up. June 2015 brought the first one-day nationwide (often violent) protests against UberPOP services. Claiming that these services threaten their livelihood, taxi unions talked about 30-40% loss of income that they experienced due to UberPOP’s operations. Consequently, Bernard Cazaneuve, France’s then Minister of the Interior and since 2016 Prime Minister, again ordered a ban on the low-cost car-sharing service, while president Francois Holland added that “UberPOP should be dissolved and branded illegal and cars should be seized”. Uber replied by suspending UberPOP and announcing its future reintroduction as pending on the court’s decision confirming the illegality of them and the like in France. This confirmation arrived some months later, and met Uber’s declaration of respecting the ban and being open for a dialogue with the French government. What followed, however, has put the company’s declaration in doubt, leading to another one-day protest of taxi drivers in January 2016, and even a tidy sum of €800,000 court fine on Uber for running the illegal UberPOP service and employing unlicensed drivers. Taking into consideration the development up till now, the future brings a lot of uncertainty.

Now, how could we look at this example with the help of the triple-legged framework presented above? In its essence, the vision presented by the sharing and collaborative economy supporters can be interpreted as a countermovement towards the dominant neoliberal order. This countermovement, however, is being co-opted by another countermovement aiming at strengthening the utopia of self-regulating market in the era of hyperglobalization, as expressed in the actions of Uber. As technological advancement (or perhaps, commodification of technology?) opens up the stage for this platform capitalism embodiment of the commercial framing of the sharing economy, a new extension of global markets is in the making. In Polanyi’s eyes, the “Uber wave” of commodification is explicitly destabilizing constitutive elements of social life of a particular social group – taxi drivers. Curiously, Uber drivers stand somehow in between democracy and hyperglobalization arms: they have benefited from the tough hand of the global free market and little nation state regulation, yet they slowly start to realize the bitterness of those benefits in terms of security and protection. At the same time, the myth of self-regulating market and the interlinked interpretation of freedom as acting “by man’s will and wish alone” resonates in the voices of those consumers who condemn taxi industry’s protests and “walk their talk” through choosing Uber over a taxi ride. These ideas immediately bring Polanyi’s formal and substantial definitions of the economic to mind, showing yet again the dominance of the former. The actors involved in the dynamics in question in each of the arms of Rodrik’s trilemma can be visually mapped as follows:

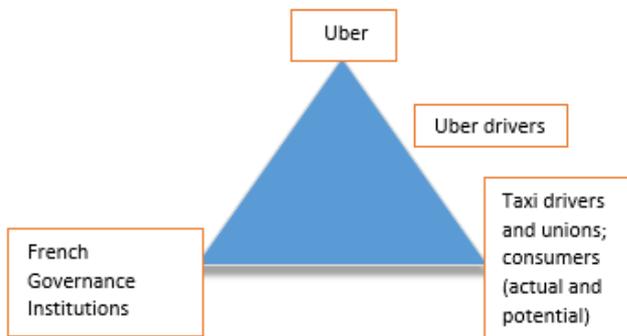


Figure 3 "Uber" Trilemma - actors

Again, I stress that this is a draft version of the argument and an attempt of using the theoretical lens suggested that is welcoming feedback and will evolve. What is discussed here should therefore be seen as an invitation to a dialogue and work in progress. Complementing Rodrik with Blyth allows us to include ideas into the reading of the tensions and dynamics between the different actor groups. This, however, reveals the weakness of the overt structuralism and lack of flexibility of Rodrik's trilemma, as shown in how some ideas are shared among groups located on different angles of the triangle. Enhanced further with Polanyi's insights, on the meta-level, the collaborative economy can be seen as an overarching area of social struggle, where two countermovements clash. Coming back to ideas, let's start with the lower arm of the nation state and French Governance Institutions in that case. As mentioned in the short story line of Uber's activities in France, what seems to be the majority voice in the French government issued a very clear statement of support for regulation and protection of the existing taxi industry system¹. Consequently, they expressed their concern with the dangers of the uncontrolled self-regulating market, and supported regulation a source of freedom and higher certainty. Nevertheless, as shown by the steps of the Council of State, those with opposite interests who believe in the harm of hampering competition on the free market can play a powerful role in the dynamics of this conflict. The case of Uber on the arm of hyperglobalization is more straight forward in terms of their believe in their right to operate on the French market despite of the protests of the local communities whose livelihoods are threatened as a result. The company's theoretical suspension of UberPOP services, with practical continuation of providing the service sends rather ambiguous signals. Moving on to the democracy angle of the trilemma, we can see a plurality of actors with various interests. Taxi drivers, usually in unionized forms, have spoken firmly for the idea of protection and regulation as a necessity for a harmonious and decent functioning of their already highly regulated industry. Consumers, or taxi service users, have often responded with a "homo economicus login in the background" – lower price offered for the same service by Uber has been attractive enough to keep the company in constant growth regardless of the issues accompanying Uber's integration with local markets. The multiplying complaints of Uber drivers, as well as those warning against exploitive labor practices of the "Big Sharing" giants such as Uber, consumers seem to oppose government's protective intervention for the sake of keeping their right of freedom as their right to unobstructed choice on the market. Coming back to the trilemma as a whole, the dynamics of restricting democracy, limiting globalization, or globalizing democracy

¹ I would like to strongly emphasise that the existing solutions in taxi industry are not without fault themselves. This, however, lies outside of the scope of this paper.

becomes much more complex once we realize the blurry lines between each of its angles. Incorporating a Polanyian view of the double movement as the foundation of the trilemma copes with those blurred lines.

4. Final Thoughts

In times of multiple crises and in hope for new utopias that bring us closer to realizing socio-ecological transformation(s), alternative to further commodification and marketization, I believe we need to keep on looking for new ways of understanding concepts of what our colleagues from economic geography would define as diverse economies (Gibson-Graham, 2008). Collaborative economy is, in my understanding, one of such concepts, which happens to portray the dynamics between the modern countermovements. Moreover, it posits a possibility to analyse the tensions between hyperglobalization, nation state (or other territorialized governance institutions), and democracy. Finally, these tensions are embedded in particular ideas and concepts, expressed in various discursive forms.

This paper aims to open a discussion, and hopefully lead to multi-perspective explorations of a range of intriguing questions on the dynamics and future development of the collaborative economy and similar concepts. To begin with, why the liberal utopia of the market as an institution that increases our freedom manages to succeed as visible in the case discussed here? What gives Uber advantage over local solutions – is it economies of scale and the ability and resources to create platform monopoly? What exactly stands behind the involved countermovements – which (utopian) ideas do they relate to? As Schor et al. put it, the visionary supporters of the collaborative economy imagine a society where “self-realization through cooperation” (Schor et al., 2015:17). How would the discussions and dynamics look like if the mainstream would be based on the substantial meaning of the economic and ideas that it brings along?

In the paper I do a very simple mapping of actors based on a small qualitative content analysis and simply following the topic as an area of my research. I treat this paper as an invitation. An invitation to explore questions as mentioned before, and more.

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