"New Perspectives on the Digital Economy:
Sharing, Platforms and Regulation"
2 December 2022

Neo-craft work: a case of 'platformised' labour

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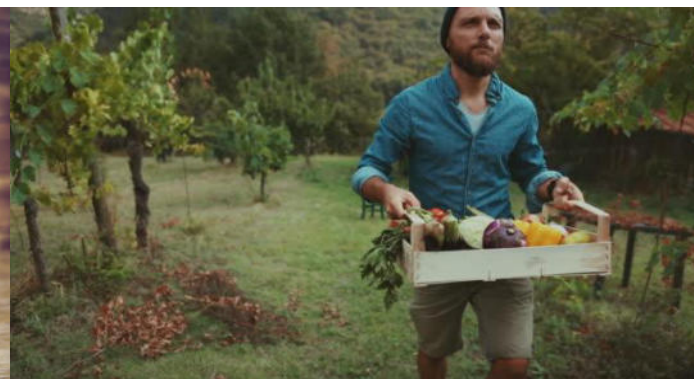# The **CRAFTWORK** project

ERC Starting grant 2020 - "CRAFTWORK" (2021-2025)

The study of new forms of craft work and the relationship between identity and work in the context of the debate on the "future of work"
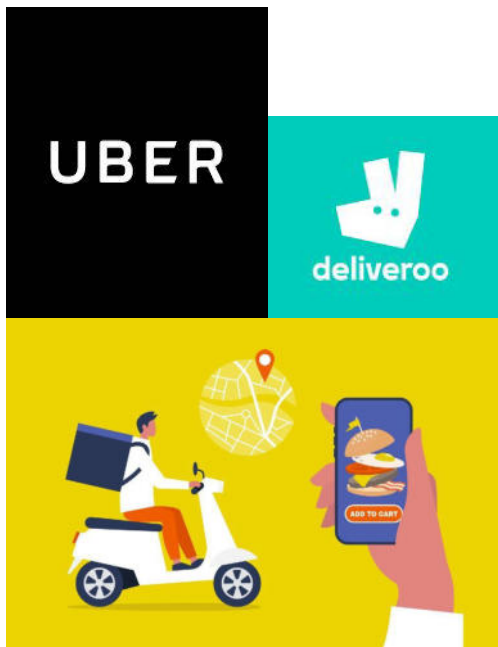
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European Research Council
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A premise: platform labour

Gandini, A. (2021). Digital labour: an empty signifier?. *Media, Culture & Society*, 43(2), 369-380.

Audience Labor (Smythe, 1977)	Digital Labor (Fuchs 2010, 2012, 2014)	Platform Labor
Viewers - Audience as a commodity (Smythe, 1977)	Users - Audiences as Prosumers (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010)	Workers
Consumption of media as work	Free labour (Terranova, 2000), fan labour	Paid work
Waged vs Unwaged work	Playbor (Kuchlich, 2005; Scholz, 2012)	Venture labor (Neff, 2012)
TV	Social network sites	Platforms
Time	Time	Data, reputation

3 types of platform labour

- platform-based work (e.g. Uber, Deliveroo) → where the platform organizes and oversees the capital-labour relation

- platform-dependent work (e.g. content creators) → where platform activity constitutes the essential component of work, but workers' tasks are not organized/overseen by the platform

- *platformised* work → All other work which social relations of production are repurposed (in part or in full) by way of platform intermediation, despite it not *necessarily* being enabled by, or undertaken through/on, a platform, e.g. *'Neo-craft' work (Ocejo, 2017; Land, 2018) and the artisanal economy*

What is neo-craft work?

"Recent years have seen a resurgence of what we might call neo-craft industries. From artisanal coffee-roasters, cider-makers, brewers and gin-distillers to high-end barbers and whole-animal butchers, sociologists like Emma-Jayne Abbots, Thomas Thurnell-Read, and Richard Ocejo, have all pointed to the growing number of small, artisanal or craft producers" (Land, 2018)

Epitomised by craft beer brewing (Fox Miller 2019, 2017; Land et al., 2018; Thurnell-Read, 2014), 'neo-craft' work consists in the recuperation of old (sometimes pre-industrial) forms of production and their adaptation to the current market economy.

'Neo-craft' work is connoted by a peculiar combination of traditional craft work – that is, "concerned with the skilful production of high-quality products" – with "a post- industrial imaginary" that promises "a less alienated form of work" (Land, 2018: np). It is principled on *authenticity* as a cultural conception of value and source for meaning, and on the recognition of 'the particular' as a status-producing dynamic (Bell et al., 2019; Land, 2018: np; Ocejo, 2017).

Why neo-craft work?

The emergence of 'neo-craft' work should be located in the context of the mainstreaming of *hipster culture* and represents a 'countermovement' to the (failures of the) neoliberal creative labour market.

Key to neo-craft work is a process of *resignification* of manual and low-skilled work into status-inducing occupations. *Where is this expressed? On social media!*

"*Neo-craft work should be understood as a productive process which represents the outcome of a specific form of discursive materiality, that is, one in which discursive meanings are inextricably connected to and embodied in material practices*" (Gandini and Gerosa, forthcoming)

Those who work in 'neo-craft' industries typically are: "custom-made jewelers, artisanal bakers, independent fashion designers, (…) unfettered ceramicists, foodtruck entrepreneurs, makers of bespoke perfume and beauty products, niche micro-brewers, boutique tea blenders, producers of ethical hair products, vintners and sommeliers, tattoo artists, purveyors of recycled fashions and retro-furnishings, independent vinyl record pressers, interior design consultants and decorators, fashion stylists and merchants, baristas and coffee culture impresarios, foodies (some serving niche tastes such as paleo and vegan), body therapists and wellness gurus" (Scott, 2017: 61).

Neo-craft work as 'platformised' craft work

Social relations of production in neo-craft work are repurposed (in part or in full) by way of platform intermediation, despite it not *necessarily* being enabled by, or undertaken through/on, a platform.

This occurs at 4 levels:

- practices (social media platforms are perceived to be part and parcel of neo-craft work)
- aesthetics (social media platforms and their aesthetic canons influence the presentation of neo-craft work and, in turn, neo-craft workers strive to reproduce those same aesthetics → hipsters)
- demand & supply (neo-craft workers regularly get clients through social media)
- 'ethics' of self presentation (some platforms are better than others)

Neo-craft work as 'platformised' craft work

A)   Practices: Platform repurposing

For neo-craft workers, platforms are part and parcel of their work: they use social media as a different, but no less important, "craft" tool. In so doing, they engage in platform negotiations (e.g. ranking dependency) and guesswork (i.e. *algorithmic imaginaries*), and suffer from fatigue (unwilling to use them, not trained enough).

B)   Aesthetics: producing a peculiar 'craft imaginary' (Bell et al., 2019)

Social media are key to the *resignification* process that is distinctive of neo-craft work. Instagram, Facebook, TikTok are the tools by which their manual/working-class jobs get to be "culturalized" and connoted with an aura of 'coolness', which is essential to their recognition and economic success. In so doing, neo-craft workers must attune the normative dimension of authenticity that permeates social media culture, and strive to replicate its discourse and styles.

Neo-craft work as 'platformised' craft work

C) Demand & supply: "Anti-industrial but not anti-technological"

Neo-craft workers regularly get clients through social media. This results in that, as opposed to traditional craft workers, technology is not dismissed or opposed by neo-craft workers, but is accepted as an equally important and relevant tool to master. The degree of this acceptance intertwines with one's life and career trajectories (e.g. education, work experience) prior to the engagement in neo-craft work.

D) 'Ethics' of self presentation: "Etsy is for boys, Instagram is for men"

Social media (Instagram in particular) is where neo-craft workers perceive to belong. Craft-specific platforms such as Etsy are perceived to be for "old" types of craft workers (e.g. hobbyists). → *Self-branding*

A 'post-demographic' digital methods approach

Mapping neo-craft workers via traditional statistics: _impossible_

→ a form of "invisible labour" (Crain et al., 2016) hidden among sectoral figures and local association/terminology

So, we turned to _digital methods_: mapping of neo-craft work across six platforms: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Reddit and YouTube
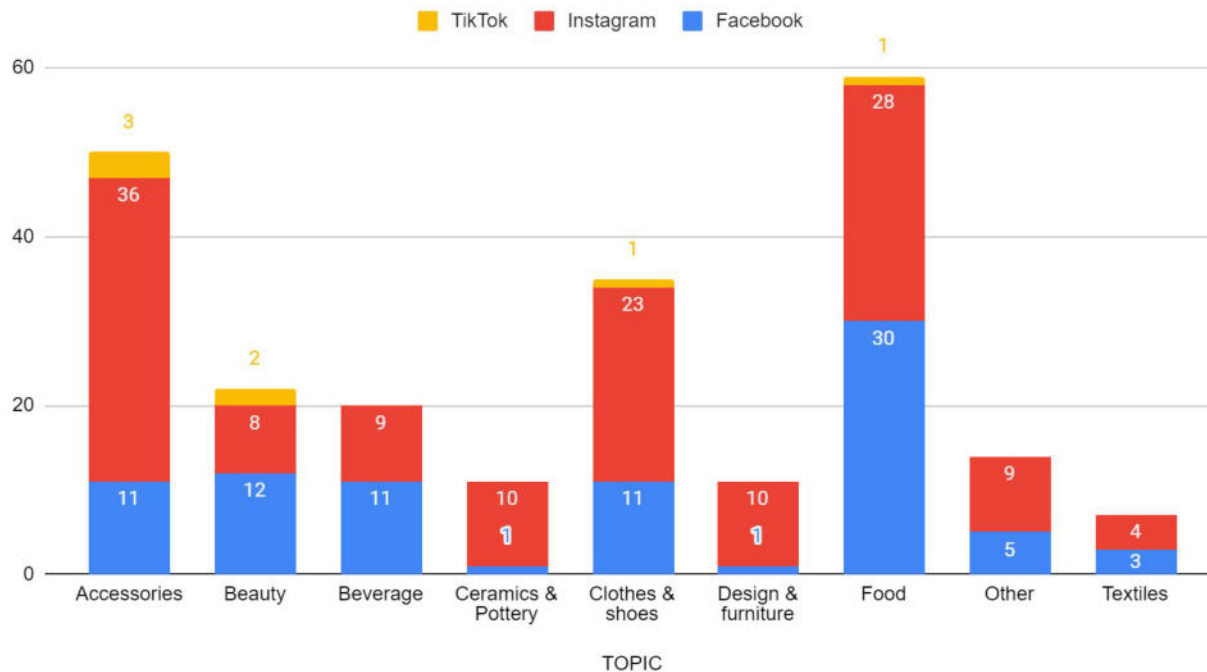
#artisanal and _#artisan_

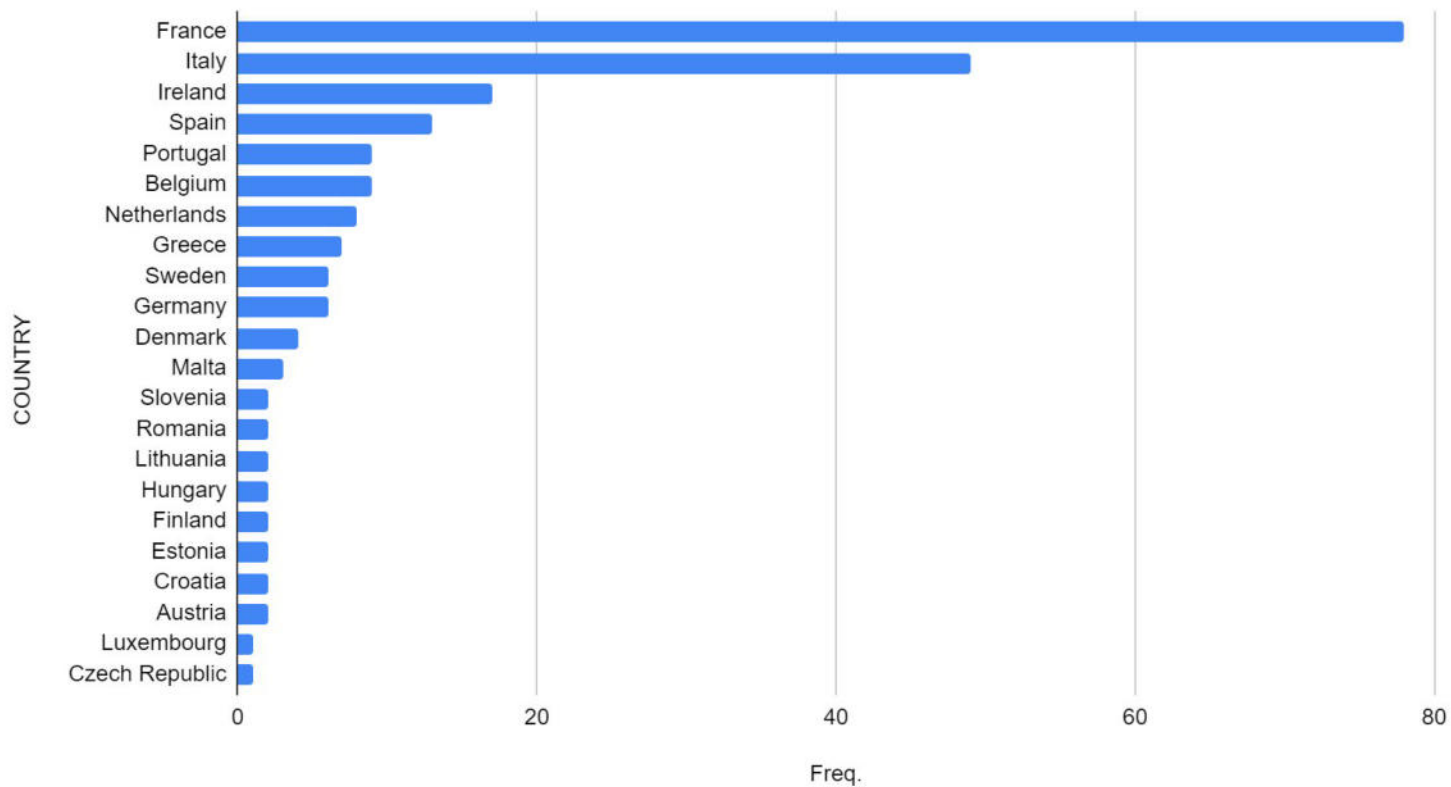→ ethnographic content analysis (Altheide, 1987) to extract (so far) 365 cases across the EU

All this leading to qualitative research (different areas of Europe, urban vs nonmetropolitan, different types of neo-craft work and forms of entrepreneurship)
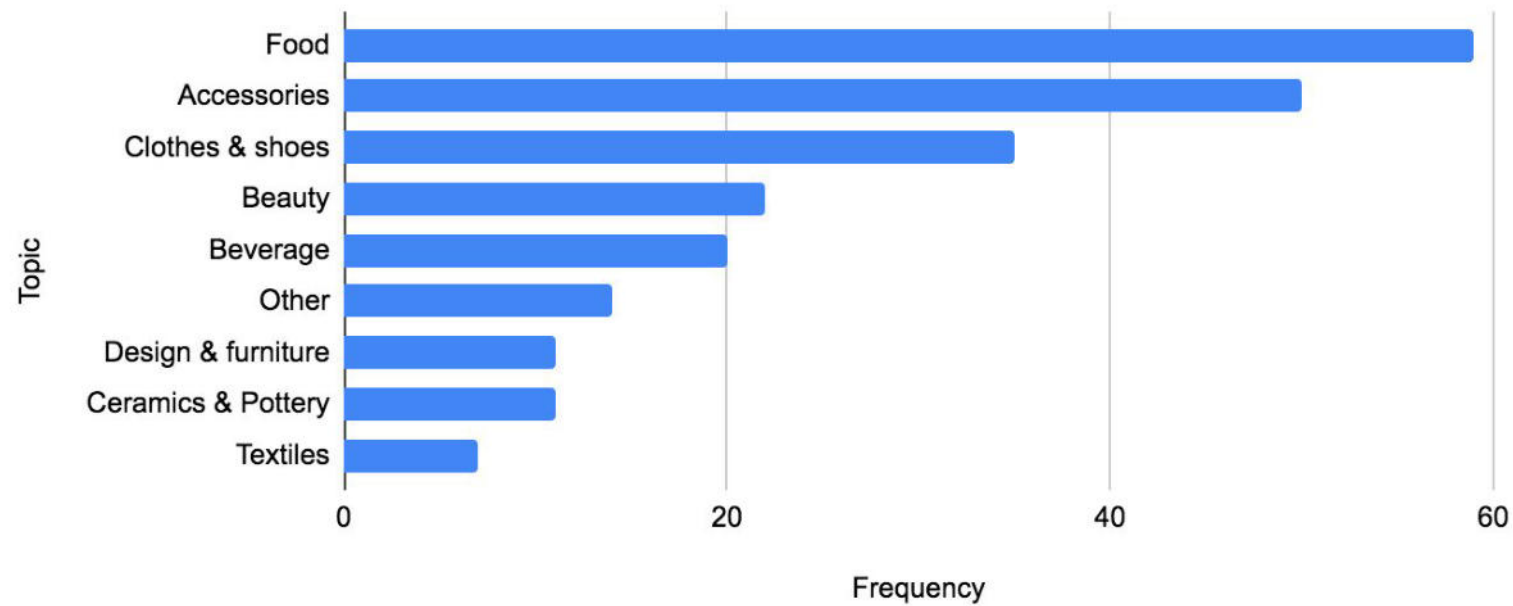
Preliminary breakdown

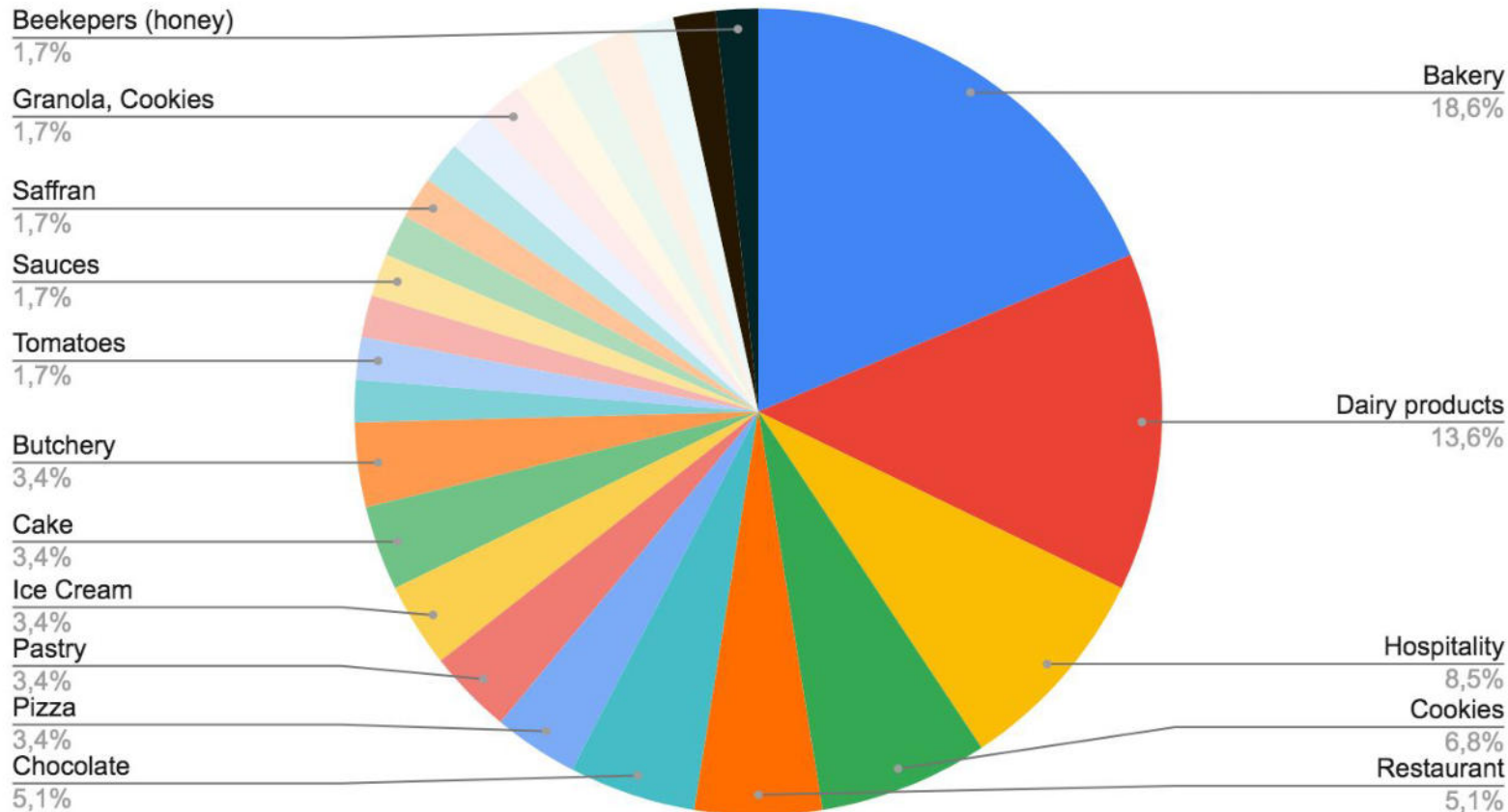Facebook, Instagram, TikTok e Totale generale

Country frequency
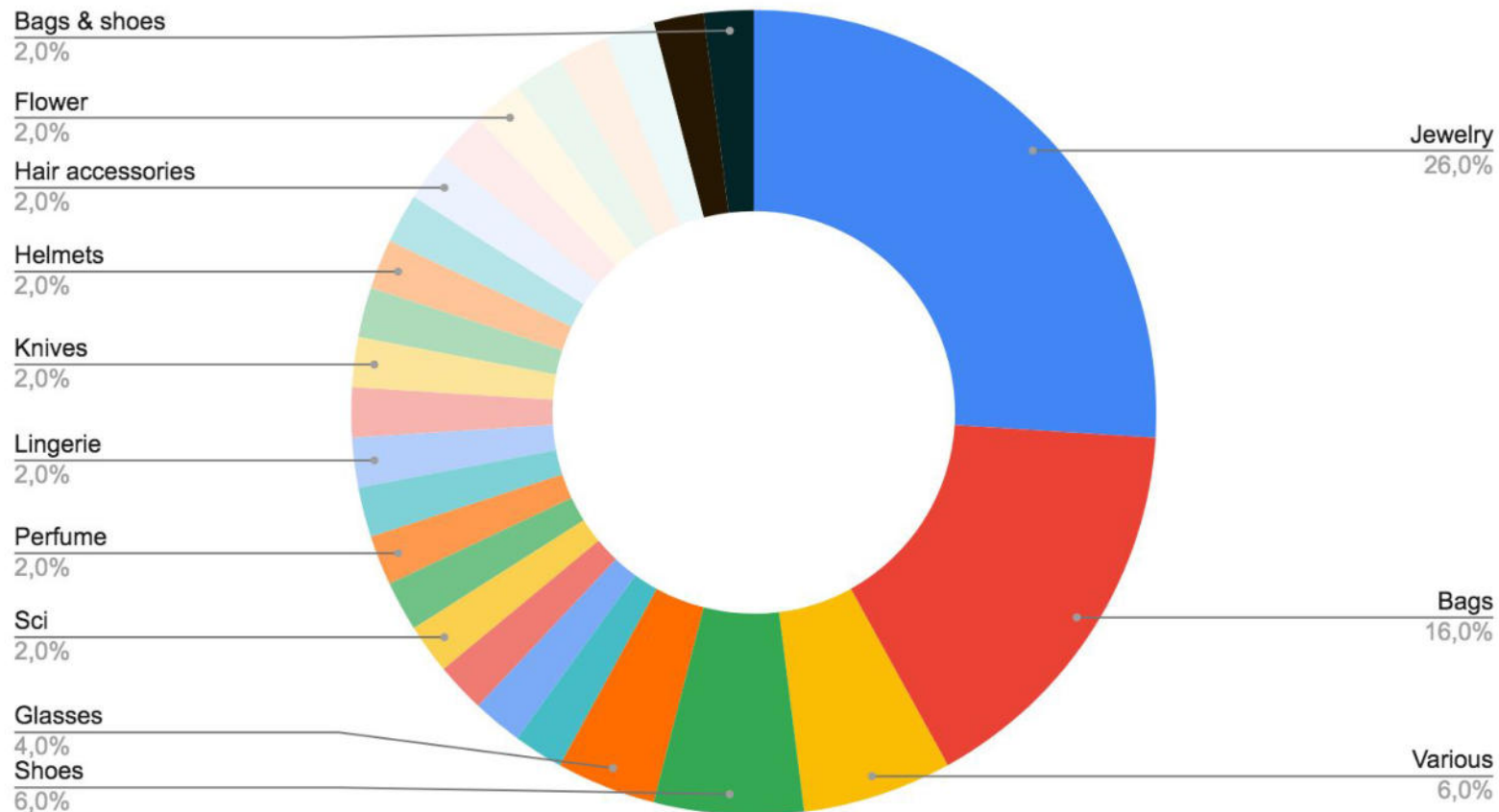
Topic frequency

Topic	Frequency
Food	59
Accessories	50
Clothes & shoes	35
Beauty	22
Beverage	20
Other	14
Design & furniture	11
Ceramics & Pottery	11
Textiles	7

Food types frequency

- Beekepers (honey) — 1,7%
- Granola, Cookies — 1,7%
- Saffran — 1,7%
- Sauces — 1,7%
- Tomatoes — 1,7%
- Butchery — 3,4%
- Cake — 3,4%
- Ice Cream — 3,4%
- Pastry — 3,4%
- Pizza — 3,4%
- Chocolate — 5,1%
- Bakery — 18,6%
- Dairy products — 13,6%
- Hospitality — 8,5%
- Cookies — 6,8%
- Restaurant — 5,1%

Accessory types frequency

- Bags & shoes — 2,0%
- Flower — 2,0%
- Hair accessories — 2,0%
- Helmets — 2,0%
- Knives — 2,0%
- Lingerie — 2,0%
- Perfume — 2,0%
- Sci — 2,0%
- Glasses — 4,0%
- Shoes — 6,0%
- Jewelry — 26,0%
- Bags — 16,0%
- Various — 6,0%

1. Carnera (Milan, Italy)

ANDATA, ORIGINE, RITORNO

CARNERA È UN VIAGGIO

Partire per un viaggio oltreoceano, abbandonare sogni e certezze per tornare con forti speranze e grandi consapevolezze. Raccontarle con l'entusiasmo che riempie occhi e bocca. Perché è tanta la voglia di condividere.

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NON USIAMO ROBUSTA

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Caffé Carnera
Caffè
Torrefazione artigianale
Blend e monorigini stagionali, in armonia con il ciclo produttivo della pianta del caffè.
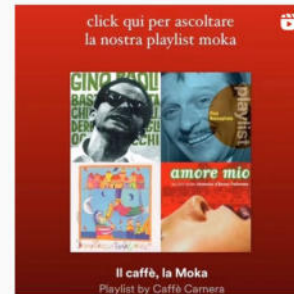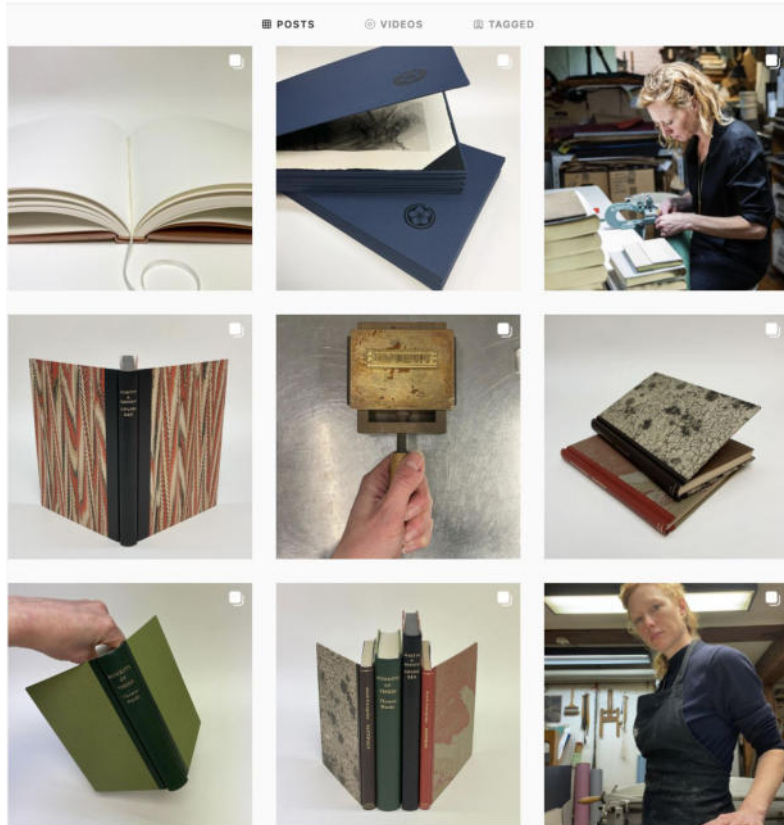Andata Origine Ritorno
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Il caffè, la Moka
Playlist by Caffè Carnera

2. Co'libri (Copenhagen, Denmark)



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Co'libri is a handbook bindery in Inner Copenhagen, which maintains the old bookbinding traditions. We bind books in materials such as goatskin, handmade marbled paper and in canvas with serigraphy. The workshop delivers everything from a single copy to a circulation of 50 books. We also offer restorations, personal touches of gold, etc., and based on our customers' wishes, we create unique photo albums, notebooks and guest books, book boxes and menu cards - in short, everything that can be made of leather, cardboard and glue.

3. Malmo Industries (Malmo, Sweden)

We are a Swedish sewing company with a wide experience of working with progressive designers and brands from different countries in and outside of Europe. We offer personal service and a collaboration that leads to high-quality textile products manufactured in line with the customer's wishes. Sustainability, transparency and solid craftsmanship are the basis of our business. Our factory and our team consisting of experienced tailors, seamstresses, pattern constructors and designers are based on Norbergsgatan in Malmö.
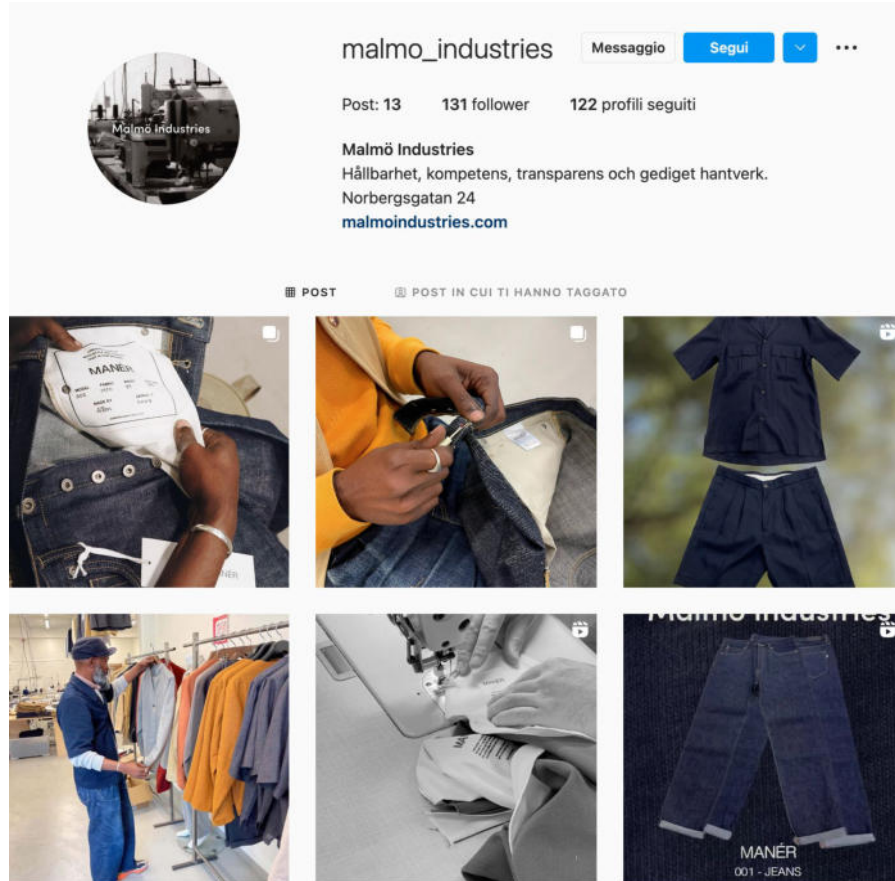
Nonconclusion - open questions

Resignification and platformisation: platform-specific (Duffy, 2017) or cross-platform?

Is this 'platformised' labour perceived as such by these workers? If so, how/why?

What relationship with 'traditional' creative work? Are they workers, artists, or what?

To what extent are neo-craft workers able to negotiate their position on platforms, and exert some agency?

(to be continued…)

Thanks!

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