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The emergence of democratic firms in the platform economy: drivers, obstacles, and the path ahead
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Platform capitalism has been accused of eroding workplace protections and a host of problematic corporate and data governance practices. What is to be done? This dissertation investigates the extent to which ‘democratic firms’ offer a meaningful alternative to platform capitalism by conferring key control and financial rights to the stakeholders that contribute intellectual, social, financial and use values to these businesses.

It makes three contributions to the literature on platform governance and regulation. First, it uses doctrinal and Delphi research methods to explore the extent to which democratic firms can ameliorate the socio-economic concerns raised by capital-managed online labour and social media platforms. Second, it unpacks the (socio-)legal obstacles that exist to the formation and governance of democratic firms in the platform economy, focusing on firms in Belgium, Canada, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Third, it charts pathways towards making democratic firms more viable.

The dissertation found that while factors such as the shifting of risk onto workers and concern about corporate accountability drove interest in democratic firms, start-up costs (e.g., obtaining adequate financing) and governance costs (e.g., member apathy) have been barriers to formation. Potential solutions are tentatively offered to overcome these barriers.

This is a volume in the series of the Meijers Research Institute and Graduate School of the Leiden Law School of Leiden University. This study is part of the Law School’s research programme ‘Coherent Private Law’.

The Emergence of Democratic Firms in the Platform Economy

Drivers, Obstacles and the Path Ahead

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