**\*Transcripts from Studio Erasmus with
Dr Roy Huijsmans

Moderator (Geert Maarse):**
Poor working conditions, low income, and no rights. This is the common perception people have about delivering meals via Uber Eats, Deliveroo or Thuisbezorgd. But is that really the case? Why do people do it? To find out, Dr Roy Huijsmans took to his bike to experience it firsthand.

That’s correct, right, Roy?

**Dr Roy Huijsmans:**
Yes, that's right.

**Moderator:**
You work at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, which is part of Erasmus University Rotterdam. But this isn't your usual work, is it?

**Dr Huijsmans:**No, I usually do other work at ISS. This was something I did on the side - part of my research. That’s the privilege of my job: having the freedom to explore the topics that interest me, even literally, by getting on a bike.

**Moderator:**
So, you weren’t exactly undercover. I mean, you were still identifiable.

**Dr Huijsmans:**Right, it’s not like I had "researcher" written on my forehead, but it was actually one of the first things the other couriers - who are mostly young men - would ask about. That’s also an ethical aspect of research. I didn’t email Deliveroo beforehand to say, ‘Hey, I’m planning this, what do you think?’ But this kind of work is built into the platform model itself: you log in online, there’s no job interview and you can just start working.

**Moderator:**
For clarity, Deliveroo is a delivery service that left the Netherlands in late 2022. But we still have several other platforms like Uber Eats and Thuisbezorgd. We'll talk more about them later.

You say that, as a researcher, you can think, ‘This is interesting, I want to learn more.’ Do you remember the moment when you thought, ‘Something is going on here, I need to investigate this’?

**Dr Huijsmans:**
Yes, I remember it clearly. Around 2017 or 2018 - I’m not exactly sure - I was sitting with a group of students, evaluating a programme. We had a small budget for pizza to encourage attendance.

The pizzas arrived in one of those delivery backpacks. After we finished eating, the bag was still there. I asked, ‘Doesn’t this need to go back to the delivery person?’

The students responded, "No, no, we borrowed it from another student."

That’s when I saw the connection between international students and gig work. Many of our students at ISS are international students and I became fascinated: How do these two worlds overlap - higher education and what is often seen as low-paid, precarious work?

**Moderator:**
Why did you decide to actually do the job yourself instead of just interviewing delivery workers?

**Dr Huijsmans:**
I tried the interview approach first. But this kind of work - and especially the people doing it - aren’t keen on long conversations. They aren’t particularly proud of the job; it’s not a career aspiration.

If I sit down with them over coffee, they’ll just say a few things, and that’s it. That wouldn’t get me anywhere in my research.

Also, I teach ethnographic research, and this was a way to apply that methodology. Instead of just talking about it academically, I wanted to immerse myself in the work environment and experience it firsthand.

**Moderator:**
So, how did you approach it?

**Dr Huijsmans:**
At first, I tried meeting up with couriers for coffee. That wasn’t very successful. Then, I started making arrangements to ride along with them for an evening, from around 6:00 PM to 10:30 PM.

That was completely different - suddenly, there was so much to observe and talk about. Instead of abstract conversations, I could see their real-life decision-making in action.

For example, when they get a ping on their phone, I’d ask, ‘What are you doing now?’ They’d show me how they accept or reject orders, explaining why they take one job but decline another.

**Moderator:**
Can you explain how the platform works?

**Dr Huijsmans:**
It depends on the company. Thuisbezorgd (orange jackets) employs couriers as workers with contracts, meaning they are paid by the hour. Deliveroo (when it operated in the Netherlands) and Uber Eats use a gig model, meaning couriers were paid per order.

Recently, the Dutch government introduced a law on false self-employment, requiring platforms like Uber Eats to hire couriers through temp agencies instead of treating them as independent contractors.

When I signed up, it was simple: no job interview, just an online form. After a basic ID check, they let you start working. Initially, you had to book shifts, but during COVID, they introduced a free login system, meaning you could just open the app and start whenever you wanted.

**Moderator:**
How much did you get paid per delivery?

**Dr Huijsmans:**
It varied based on an algorithm, but at times, I earned less than €3 per delivery.

Considering a single order could take 15-20 minutes, that puts earnings below €10 per hour during slow periods.

**Moderator:**
Did your perception of gig work change?

**Dr Huijsmans:**
Yes and no. If you do it casually, it’s fine. You get exercise, control your schedule, and it’s satisfying because you finish tasks quickly.

But for full-time couriers, it’s another story. If you work 6-7 days a week, 8-10 hours a day, earning only €11 per hour before taxes, it’s tough. And if you're an international worker, navigating Dutch tax laws can be even harder.

Plus, the app is your boss. It can deactivate you anytime with no explanation. If that happens, you have no job for three days or more while you appeal.

**Moderator:**
Any plans to go back to delivery work?

**Dr Huijsmans:**
Not right now. I’m focusing on writing up my research. But if you ever want to experience real action, go deliver on a cold, rainy night—those are the busiest evenings!

*\*The following transcripts were gathered from YouTube subtitling, then translated from Dutch to English using AI.*