

## BOOK REVIEW

# Crowdsourcing

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*Crowdsourcing*

*Daren C. Brabham*

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Daren Brabham's new book on crowdsourcing offers an accessible and concise expert overview of crowdsourcing, a subject of interest and relevance for a wide audience, including those working in the field of urban e-planning. In the preface, the author tells us how he first met the notion of crowdsourcing, the importance Jeff Howe original article in *Wired* and his blog had on this, culminating in his research on crowdsourcing in a public participation program for transit planning. He makes clear since the start what his concept of crowdsourcing is and what crowdsourcing is not and discusses in the following sections of the book the different definitions, interpretations and taxonomies proposed. For Daren Brabham, crowdsourcing is the "deliberate blend of bottom-up, open, creative process with top-down organizational goals" (p. xv), which excludes a number of practices also occasionally referred in the literature as crowdsourcing.

The book is not about participation tools per se but about how web 2.0 tools helped to redesign

the way people establish online relationships with each other and with private or public organizations. It explores the way organizations use collective intelligence of online communities in favor of its own business interests or how they use it to improve its own governance processes through citizen participation, which can be particularly inspiring for those working or doing research in the field of urban e-planning. The book is organized into four main chapters, and includes also an extensive bibliography on the topic, a list of further readings and a glossary.

In chapter 1 ('*Concepts, theories, and cases of crowdsourcing*', pp. 1-40), Daren Brabham defines crowdsourcing and discusses other similar practices which in his opinion do not meet one or more of the key characteristics of his concept of crowdsourcing, and presents succinctly some of the best-known cases. Among those practices usually considered to be crowdsourcing but which technically are not, Daren Brabham examines the following ones: open source, commons-base peer production, market research and brand engagement. In the case of crowdfunding, a method of distributed fundraising, which has with crowdsourcing many points in common, the author argues that it should be treated as a separate concept and not as a sub-type of crowdsourcing.

The following chapter ('*Organizing crowdsourcing*', pp. 41-59) describes several orga-

nizing typologies of crowdsourcing proposed by other authors (for example, by Jeff Howe, Nicholas Carr, Eric Martineau, and so on) and presents Daren Brabham own taxonomy. It has four primary types, a typology based on the kind of problems being solved by crowdsourcing. The four dominant crowdsourcing types proposed by Daren Brabham are: i) the knowledge discovery and management approach (the organization tasks a crowd with finding and collecting information into a common location and format); ii) the broadcast search approach (the organization tasks a crowd with solving empirical problems); the peer-vetted creative production approach (the organization tasks a crowd with creating and selecting creative ideas); and the distributed human intelligence tasking approach (the organization tasks a crowd with analyzing large amounts of information).

In chapter 3 (*'Issues in crowdsourcing'*, pp. 61-97) the author explores some of the key issues confronting practitioners who use crowdsourcing for some reason. These issues include motivations for crowds to participate (not very different from the motivation to participate in blogging, open-source, etc.), the demographic and professional profile of persons engaged (turning down the myth of the amateur crowd), legal issues (copyright, intellectual property and deceptive business practices) and ethical issues associated with the practice of crowdsourcing

(free speech, digital slavery, crowd exploitation, labor rights, digital divides and the fact that the voices of the marginalized are not heard) and the various forms of crowd resistance (disruptive and destructive crowdslapping, cracking, and ignoring).

The last chapter (*'The future of crowdsourcing'*, pp. 99-115) discusses new research directions in this field and future practical applications, namely its use in journalism, public participation, and governance, some of which are of particular interest for urban e-planning. Daren Brabham identifies future trends in technology, future applications and future research directions, for instance research on the new professions associated with the online community management and research on the professional crowd.

In sum, this well informed and succinctly written study on crowdsourcing, seen as a co-creative effort of crowd and organization, provides a rigorous and accessible account that will be of interest for a wide multidisciplinary audience. The expected growth of crowdsourcing in the coming years will certainly create new challenges and new opportunities for individuals and organizations. For Urban e-Planning crowdsourcing can be a valuable ally in its intent to enhance and empower citizen e-participation in urban affairs.

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