

## New forms of employment Crowd employment, Spain

Case study 23: Adtriboo.com

*Crowd employment platforms in Spain have experienced remarkable growth as the economic crisis has increased the number of workers looking for alternative forms of employment. Adtriboo.com, the largest crowd employment platform in Spain, is a client–worker matching tool in the design and audiovisual activities sector.*

### Introduction

Crowd employment platforms in Spain are a rather recent development. However, they have experienced remarkable growth during the economic crisis. The number of workers and clients has increased in the sectors already using crowd employment (including creative design), and the phenomenon has spread to other sectors such as housing and design, computing, book editing and translation (InfoCrowdsourcing, 2013; Crowdsourcing blog, 2013). Many of the Spanish platforms have extended their scope to include other countries, particularly in Latin America. Many of them have also fully translated their platforms into English in order to reach an even wider market.

The economic crisis has certainly played an important role in increasing the number of workers looking for alternative forms of employment. The high and persistent unemployment among young professionals holding a university degree has led to the expansion of part-time work and self-employment (Molina and López-Roldán, 2014). Similarly, as companies started implementing cost-cutting strategies, including firing personnel, restructuring, and outsourcing, they began to rely more on crowdsourcing because of the cheaper access to marketing and communication services (Galmés and Arjona, 2012). However, it is important not to overstress the short-term economic reasons behind the development of these platforms. The opportunities offered by new technologies, together with a well educated population, as well as the difficulties in reconciling family and work life have all contributed to the steady growth of this new form of employment.

However, in spite of this growth, there are still very few studies of crowdsourcing/crowd employment platforms in Spain. Estellés and Gonzalez (2012a) provide a definition that allows the identification of a crowdsourcing initiative on the basis of eight elements. According to them, there are two necessary conditions any crowd work initiative has to meet.

- There has to be a large and heterogeneous crowd of registered workers.
- There has to be a specific task to be performed, the achievement of which is open to proposals from this crowd (Estellés and Gonzalez, 2012b, p. 284).

These authors developed a very detailed analysis of existing international definitions and classifications of crowdsourcing initiatives.

The lack of studies about such initiatives in Spain is surprising, given the rapid increase of the number of companies and workers using these platforms. In particular, there is no systematic assessment of the benefits and /or challenges for workers and companies in Spain, along the lines of the work carried out in North America by Kittur et al (2013). As the analysis of Adtriboo.com will make clear, crowdsourcing may have significant benefits to both companies and workers. However, the distribution of these benefits among the clients and the crowd will depend on the development of future mechanisms to guarantee better protection of workers' working conditions and their intellectual property rights.

The direct translation of crowd work in Spanish is 'massive outsourcing' (*externalización masiva*) and refers to a business practice that relies upon the 'crowd' in order to carry out some very specific tasks. In this way, the development of crowdsourcing has to be viewed as a quantitative, but also qualitative, change towards the decentralisation of production and outsourcing. It nonetheless has some very specific features which distinguish it from the traditional understanding of outsourcing. First of all, it relies upon new technology. Secondly, it implies (in most cases) relying upon individuals and not companies. Finally, it mostly implies an external one-off implementation of very specific tasks.

The analysis of Adtriboo.com has been carried out on the basis of three main sources of information:

- a review of the existing literature on Spanish crowdsourcing platforms;
- six interviews with the management of the platform, its workers, clients, and a trade union official in charge of self-employed workers; and
- relevant news and newspaper articles on crowdsourcing.

## **General characteristics of Adtriboo.com**

Adtriboo.com is the largest crowd employment platform in Spain, belonging to the so-called creative crowdsourcing type (Piyathasanan et al, 2011; Estellés and Gonzalez, 2012a). Its legal form is that of a limited liability company (*Sociedad Limitada*). This means that private investors and shareholders are liable only for their share of capital invested in the company. Ownership is divided up among three legal entities. The largest is Digital Assets Deployment (DAD) plus the two owners that occupy managing positions in Adtriboo.com.

Adtriboo.com is a client-worker matching tool in the design and audiovisual activities sector. It was started in September 2011 as a platform where a client could publish a contest for a specific task and receive ideas and finished proposals from workers. In May 2012, it included a hire-a-freelancer service whereby a client would publish a certain task and then receive budget proposals from workers willing to work on that task.

Employees may be hired on the Adtriboo platform based on either hiring a freelance or selecting a winning project in a contest. The most common tasks announced on the platform are:

- designing a corporate image (logo design, brochure, catalogue, web design, mobile app, illustration or drawing);
- making videos for business (spot, video motion graphics, stop motion video, viral video, short film);
- audio editing (musical composition, voice over, voice ad, sound resource, jingles);
- working on texts and naming (brand or product name, article, video script, domain name, slogan).

The operational model of Adtriboo.com is similar to other creative crowd employment platforms. A business in need of a certain service creates a pitch to the community of 'creatives' (creative design professionals/workers). The interested professionals submit their proposals within a

specific contest and once the contest is over, the business selects the winner and remunerates the selected people for their services. This is essentially the way the platform operates for both the contest and hire-a-freelancer options.

In order to attract a larger number of professionals and companies, Adtriboo.com has tried to differentiate itself from similar platforms by offering, as mentioned, a diversity of tasks and projects, and by offering companies that are willing to pay a premium the chance to customise aspects of the contest (such as its public visibility, pre-selection of certain candidates, and privacy). Furthermore, even though the general headquarters of the platform are in Madrid, it also targets Spanish-speaking South America, and all its contents were translated into English in 2013 in order to reach other EU countries.

The platform has around 135,000 registered workers in several countries, including Spain, Argentina, Chile, Ecuador and Mexico. There are no preconditions for registering as a freelancer and taking part in the contests. The number of clients on the platform varies from year to year, but overall it has grown steadily since its launch in 2011. In 2012, more than 400 companies bought services through Adtriboo.com.

In October 2013, Adtriboo.com signed a collaboration agreement with one of the most important job search platforms in Spain, Infoempleo.com, which undertook to provide a link to some of the projects and/or offers announced on Adtriboo.com (RRHH Digital, 2013).

### **General characteristics of clients and workers on Adtriboo.com**

A typical worker for Adtriboo is a male, aged 26–35, with at least five years' work experience, specialised in creative design, web and apps development as well as video production. Even though the proportion of women has been increasing steadily, the majority of Adtriboo workers are men. The largest proportion of workers is in Madrid (52.8%), Barcelona (13.8%), Valencia (4.3%) and Seville (2.8%). Apart from Spain, the other countries with the largest number of freelancers registered on the platform are Argentina (4.37% of the total), Mexico (2.62%), Peru (1.24%) and Colombia (1.12%). Most workers are self-employed freelancers or have some connection to very small companies in the creative design sector.

Most of the workers registered at Adtriboo.com have a university diploma in design and/or communication and audiovisuals. Many of them also have a master's degree. However, as there are no preconditions for registering, some workers are students and/or amateurs who use the platform to gain some extra income (they also learn through participating in contests).

Most of the clients are small or medium-sized companies. However, some large companies have also used Adtriboo.com, including Toys R Us, the department chain store El Corte Ingles, Vodafone, TV channel Cuatro and BMW. There is no strong sectoral concentration, but most of the contests on the platform are published by information and communication technology (ICT) service-sector companies. Most client companies are located in Madrid, Barcelona, Andalusia and Valencia. Few of them have a formal HR department or HR policy. Thus the decision to Adtriboo.com is usually taken by senior managers looking for skills the company lacks.

### **Design and implementation process**

Adtriboo.com had its origins in Cinemavip.com, a network of audiovisual professionals established in 2008. This network introduced creative crowdsourcing and created Adtriboo in 2011, allowing professionals outside the audiovisual sector to participate. Adtriboo.com was set up by two entrepreneurs linked to the real estate sector, Jaime Sanmartín (CEO) and Juan Ramón Moreno (Managing Director). They worked together in setting up and developing the platform thanks to the legal and financial support received from Digital Assets Deployment (DAD). DAD is a business incubator of internet and new technologies based projects directed by Rodolfo Carpintier, who is also President of Adtriboo.com. Some funding also came from private

investors. In addition, these entrepreneurs used public support from a special credit line aimed at helping start-ups and small companies. Two web specialists helped design, create and develop the platform.

There is no central body in charge of administering the creation and operation of crowdsourcing platforms. There is, however, a public entity in charge of promoting the development of information society in Spain, called Red.es. Its mission is to carry out ICT projects in accordance with the strategic priorities of the State Secretariat for Telecommunications and the Information Society (SETSI), and in collaboration with the autonomous communities, councils, local authorities and the private sector. One of the objectives of Red.es is to generate jobs, through programmes aimed to develop the ICT sector and to promote entrepreneurship.

The Adtriboo.com platform was established in response to increasing demand from SMEs for high quality, flexible professional services in the creative design and audiovisual sector. According to the platform staff, this demand was there before the economic crisis, so the crisis has increased, but not created, demand for this type of platform. Yet, the crisis has opened up new opportunities. The technological developments are certainly a necessary precondition for the creation of crowdsourcing businesses, but are not, in themselves, sufficient to explain their development.

Adtriboo.com has relied on social networks to gain more clients and workers. All three workers, as well as the client, who were interviewed for this study said they learned about Adtriboo.com from a personal recommendation.

One of the main reasons for clients to use the platform is the relatively good cost:quality ratio. According to the clients interviewed, they value the opportunity to access a large pool of competing skilled professionals, as this puts a downward pressure on the costs. This is especially important to the SMEs.

The client interviewee said that it has not used any other crowdsourcing platform. According to interviewees, finding an idea that suits the client needs on Adtriboo.com is not difficult given the large number of professionals who are registered there. Interestingly, using a professional creative design studio has become less attractive due to the higher costs. One client who was interviewed said a professional studio charges a lot just for one idea which might not be acceptable. By contrast, Adtriboo.com offers the opportunity of accessing lots of ideas more cheaply. The client of the platform is also aware of the costs in advance and has a money-back guarantee in case no idea is suitable.

The interviewed company used Adtriboo.com for developing a new logo. The idea came from a meeting of the company's Director General and other colleagues. It is a small company without a marketing department and therefore the decision was quick and rather informal.

The workers' key reason for offering their services on the platform was better labour market opportunities. Two of the interviewed workers do not have a stable source of income and see the platform as an important way of making money until they find a more stable alternative. One of the workers who has a stable (albeit small) income, uses Adtriboo.com for generating additional income. (As the average income of Adtriboo crowd workers depends on the time spent for platform tasks, their skills, and the type of project, it is not possible to give any general estimates about the amount of cash involved.) However, all of the interviewed workers agreed that the platform was very effective in helping them to become more noticeable and to meet new business partners. One of the interviewees drew attention to the reporting system on the platform. This system allows clients to see comments about the performance of a specific worker as well as to grade the performance on a 0–10 scale. This has not only opened new opportunities but also provided some recognition of the skills of the worker and quality of the service.

All three workers said they were registered on more than one platform. However, there are only three or four alternative platforms and the three interviewees agreed that Adtriboo.com has the best reputation and offers more opportunities because of its wider geographical scope.

It is also important to note that two of the interviewees would recommend Adtriboo.com not only to experienced professionals, but also to young students and professionals who are just starting out. They argue that the contests provide them with a good opportunity to show their ideas and improve their skills. One interviewee pointed out that normally it would be unthinkable for a young professional to have his/her ideas assessed by large companies. For most of the professionals joining Adtriboo, working for a large company would be impossible outside the platform, and it gives workers very valuable experience, including an insight into the expectations of companies. Therefore, taking part in the contests is useful, even if a specific bid was not successful.

## **Working method, processes and procedures**

Crowd employment platforms in Spain are not subject to any specific legislation. The staff of Adtriboo.com thought that this is due to the simple business model of the company, which is limited to providing a virtual space for professionals and clients to meet each other. This also implies that the company does not have to consider any collective agreement when offering the possibility of work as it does not employ workers or establish any working relationship with them. Adtriboo.com staff themselves are covered by the ICT sector's national collective agreement.

It is important to note that both workers and the client who were interviewed said simplicity and reliability were key reasons for participating in the crowdsourcing platform. There is no demand from either the workers and/or the client for any additional services. Building a good reputation among professionals has been the main competitive advantage of Adtriboo.com.

The platform has six employees and the president. The staff were selected competitively. The minimum requirements are good computer skills, and it is an advantage to have a good command of English (given that the platform wants to expand its geographical scope) as well as web design skills. Other, specific, skills are required depending on the position (for example, accountancy or customer care).

The organisational structure of Adtriboo.com is simple, partly due to the small number of employees. Two employees deal with the managerial tasks (chief executive officer and managing director). The chief software architect is in charge of the technical aspects of the platform, including web development. The projects director is in charge of managing the projects advertised and guaranteeing that they comply with the terms and conditions. The remaining staff are responsible for marketing, accounting and clerical tasks. The managerial team decides on all the strategic aspects, including new services and investment. Decisions on technical aspects are taken by the managers and technical staff.

There is no formal selection process for admitting new workers and clients to the platform.

Anyone can register. Information posted by workers and clients is not checked unless the platform and/or one of its users detects some violation of the terms and conditions.

Communication between client and worker, and between platform and client or worker, always takes place through the platform. The platform does not take responsibility in the case of a dispute between a client and a worker. However, according to the management, there have been very few conflicts. Moreover, there is no registration fee for either clients or workers. Clients asking for a service must deposit the final payment with the platform. If one of the projects is selected, the platform will make the payment and charge 15% as a commission. If no project is suitable, the platform returns the money without charging the fee.

The key function of the platform is matching client and worker. A worker joining the platform has to complete an online form, including some data that will be available to clients and other fields (including name, surname, sex, birthdate) that will only be only visible in the worker space. A client does not need to register with the platform: it only has to complete an online form defining the characteristics of the project (such as type of task, price, and expected delivery date). One of the few additional services is the Affiliate Programme which allows workers and/or clients to obtain some remuneration by promoting Adtriboo.com via search engines, internet forums or friend references (Adtriboo, 2013). Another service is the ability of clients to comment and grade the services provided by specific workers. The return of the client's deposit (in the case of unsatisfactory proposals) could also be considered as a service.

When a client advertises a project or wants to hire a freelancer it has to define the type of the task and the deadline. The platform automatically sets a minimum level of pay for the worker, which depends on the task. It can range from €200 for designing a logo, to €3,000 for making a video. This is calculated according to market prices, taking into account the approximate number of hours spent by an average worker to perform that task. However, the platform does not show its calculations and its prices are lower than the going market rate, although the client can offer a higher fee. As has been mentioned, the client recovers all its money if no project is selected, but the fact that it has to firstly deposit the cash with the platform as a guarantee of the payment is one of the reasons why, according to the interviewed workers, many professionals prefer Adtriboo.com to other platforms. The interviewees gave examples of clients at other platforms taking advantage of an idea without actually paying for it.

The client has the opportunity to obtain preferential treatment on the platform as well as advertise its project on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. In both cases, the client has to pay an additional €29. There is also a privacy option. All projects, by default, are visible to all workers, and any worker may bid for a project. By paying an additional €59, a client company can have a private gallery, where anyone can still submit ideas/projects, but only the client can see them. The most expensive option, costing €99, is a confidential project where the client may preselect workers to see the bid and only the client has access to their projects and ideas.

However, the only requirement for the clients is to deposit the payment. There are no standard requirements regarding the time frame of project delivery. Once a client has registered and a project or a job announcement has been posted, the platform lets client and worker define their relationships.

Any worker can register on the platform and participate in project/task contests or be hired as a freelancer, although a worker must be legally registered as a self-employed person before signing the contract with the client. However, the platform does not check this; and the responsibility lies with the worker, not the platform. Anyone (including minors) can register and participate, although if a person is under 18, the platform asks for parental authorisation.

Competition is key to selecting projects and freelancers. The client has access to the public profiles and characteristics of workers (username, country and main skills and qualifications) when hiring a freelancer, or to their projects or ideas when setting a project contest. The platform's terms and conditions for workers clearly state that personal data will be treated according to existing legislation and that a client's decision is to be based on an assessment of quality made by the client according to its needs.

Crowd employment does not impose any social protection obligations on either the platform or the client. The workers have to take care of these obligations themselves. In the case of self-employed people, some recent legislative changes have improved their access to unemployment benefits and other social protection measures such as health insurance and old age pensions. The 2007 Self-Employment Statute law provides a comprehensive and systematic legal framework covering all aspects of self-employment (Eurofound, 2009).

Communication between the platform administration, workers and clients is limited to the initial stages of a project. The design of the platform makes it unnecessary to communicate with the clients and workers directly after that. The platform may interfere if a client and/or worker does not comply with the terms agreed when publishing and/or joining the project. In this case the platform will, depending on the type of dispute, try to mediate to find a solution.

## External support

The founders of the platform relied upon financial resources and advice from the business incubator DAD for designing and launching the platform. They considered this support key to the success of the platform. The existence of a previous network (Cinemavip) also made it easier to receive funding for the new project. Then, in early 2012, the Adtriboo founders managed to attract €1 million from private investors, using it to consolidate its position in the Spanish and Latin American markets as well as to expand to other European countries through the translation of the platform into English (*EuropaPress*, 2012).

The platform has also raised funding from Plan Avanza, backed by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism. This plan aims to achieve convergence in ICT with the most progressive European countries and Spanish autonomous regions. Another objective of this plan is contributing to the change of the economic model in Spain, based on the assumption that a greater use of ICT:

- leads to more competitiveness and productivity;
- favours equal opportunities;
- boosts the economy;
- encourages sustainable economic growth.

The funding awarded to Adtriboo.com was for ‘Development of a professional crowdsourcing platform through computer applications and tools specifically aimed at public administration, smart cities and SMEs’ (Desarrollo de una plataforma profesional de crowdsourcing mediante aplicaciones y herramientas informáticas específicas dirigidas a la administración pública, smart cities y pymes). The project reference number was TSI-020606-2012-037.

## Outcomes

All the interviewees agreed that the platform is reliable and that clients and workers get what they were promised. Anyone participating knows what to expect from the platform although some participants dislike a few characteristics (see below for a more detailed discussion of the strengths and weaknesses).

The platform management say the initial objectives of the founders have been achieved. The numbers of workers, clients, and projects advertised have increased significantly because of the platform. Furthermore, it has become a reference point for SMEs looking for marketing and communication expertise. This way the platform has significantly contributed to the much praised ‘democratisation of talent’, which was also an important starting goal of the platform managers (*El Confidencial*, 2011).

According to one of the founding members of Adtriboo.com, in an interview with online newspaper *ABC*, the main labour market effect of crowdsourcing platforms is not so much a massive creation of small jobs, but the transformation of the employment concept itself (*ABC*, 2012). These platforms bring new employment opportunities and some workers who have difficulty in finding permanent employment (particularly women and young people aged between 18 and 30) may use such platforms as a way of gaining an income while searching for a job.

The platform management has a very positive perception of the effects of crowdsourcing on the economy, labour market, companies and workers. Companies benefit from the 'democratisation of creativity' because rather than outsourcing their tasks to other companies they can avoid intermediaries and work directly with the workers. As a result they have access to many ideas (rather than just one idea as is traditionally the case with outsourcing) at a cost that can sometimes be ten times cheaper than a comparable offline service. This is particularly important for start-ups and SMEs. Moreover, the companies using crowdsourcing know, in advance, the cost of subcontracting a certain task. Finally, these platforms also minimise the transaction costs as there are no meetings between clients and workers and, in the case of contests, no time is needed for monitoring. Even though there is a need to supervise the worker when hiring a freelancer, the fact that the task has already been defined and agreed by both parties also reduces the transaction costs.

The interviewee from the trade union was more sceptical. He believes that crowdsourcing constitutes a further step towards more extensive outsourcing. Given that outsourcing takes place from companies to individuals, this brings a significant deterioration of working conditions. According to this interviewee, traditional outsourcing creates a dependent type of employment. Even though crowdsourcing implies self-employment rather than dependent employment, self-employed workers are still in a precarious position in terms of their working conditions. Furthermore, there is no control over who has access to the platform, which makes it possible for minors and non-professionals to offer their services. Given that any client has access to thousands of workers, it weakens the worker's position with the employer. The trade union interviewee also warned that, since practically anyone can present and submit their ideas on the platform, this could reduce the incentives for individuals to accumulate formal skills. He also pointed out the downward pressure that these platforms put on crowd workers' wages due to prices which are less than the going market rate. Due to increased competition, this trend on pay spills over to the creative design sector as a whole. This issue also came up in the interviews with workers.

Nevertheless, trade unions also agree that crowd employment platforms have certainly given opportunities to some unemployed workers, especially younger ones, to earn money. They also agree that this kind of working can help certain groups, such as women with children, to reconcile work and family life. However, the union representative stressed that this positive aspect should be enhanced through better regulations on the working conditions of those participating in crowd employment.

The client interviewed thought that crowd employment platforms have an extremely positive role in the economy and the labour market. This is especially true for an economy dominated by SMEs and in the middle of a deep economic crisis, with limited access to credit and many companies facing severe liquidity problems. It is extremely attractive, therefore, to be able to hire professionals for a specific task at a significantly lower cost and with full flexibility. Furthermore, the client felt that services provided by platform are at least as good as those provided by traditional 'off-line' companies.

The client did not think that crowd employment platforms hinder the creation of jobs. He said the tasks outsourced through such platforms are very small and, without such a platform, companies would have to hire a creative design agency or carry out those tasks themselves relying on staff who do not have the necessary skills (leading to less than satisfactory results). He feels, therefore, that crowdsourcing could be considered as a way of creating jobs.

The platform's main beneficial effect on workers is the opportunity of earning extra income, even though there is no employment stability. All the workers interviewed agreed that participating and being active on the platform is a valuable experience, although this does not necessarily translate into greater job opportunities or a continuous employment relationship. Only one of the workers interviewed confirmed that participation in the contests led to him being hired by some companies as a freelancer and extending his initial relationship with a client.



Workers also benefit from being able to contact and work for large companies; an unthinkable idea for many of them without the help of the platform. Through their ideas/projects and the assessment of clients, workers build a reputation and a portfolio that is useful not only for working on the platform, but also for their wider careers. Moreover, all of them agree that the projects advertised are, in general, interesting and provide an opportunity for personal professional improvement due to the high level of competition.

In general the workers appreciated the flexibility associated with work through the platform. However, all of them agreed that there is a lot of pressure from clients to reduce costs. The workers said that, given the number of hours spent on preparing projects, the payment is sometimes ridiculously small. Yet, they also acknowledged that the price is known in advance. Sometimes they consider participation in a contest as learning opportunity rather than a way of earning money. However, the workers also agreed that they do not expect the platform to help them to find a stable job.

## **Strengths and weaknesses**

The platform management feel that the key to its success is that it responds to demand from SMEs in a very simple, flexible, and transparent way. This makes it attractive to both clients and workers, and is a major achievement in a country where the development and participation in crowdsourcing platforms is still lagging behind other advanced economies. The availability of a large pool of creative workers, as well as an economy relying strongly on SMEs, provides the key ingredients for these platforms' success. The economic crisis provided further momentum by increasing the number of workers available and the pressure for companies to find ways of lowering costs and increasing flexibility.

Clients and workers say the key strengths of Adtriboo.com are the high level of customisation as well as the spread of expertise covered by the platform's registered professionals. There is almost no restriction for clients on the content of the project. The only requirements refer to general aspects such as the type of task (for example website, logo, or video), delivery time and price. This significantly increases the platform's potential number of clients. The projects advertised not only cover a wide range of areas and tasks but also differ in terms of implementation requirements, such as timing.

Neither the platform management nor experts on this issue say the legal framework hinders the development of crowd employment platforms. However, trade unions think that there is a need to better regulate the access to crowdsourcing, as well as working conditions.

The client interviewed was satisfied with the platform and appreciated the:

- large number of ideas received;
- low cost of the service and transactions;
- flexibility of choice.

This client's first project (creating a new logo) was relatively small. However, when he decided to use the platform for a more complex task (hiring a freelancer to develop a website) he was concerned about the lack of control over workers copying ideas from one another. All workers may upload their proposals on a project and all of them may see ideas suggested by the others. According to the client, this led to some workers accusing others of piracy. The client suggests more privacy for each project and scrapping the fee for the private gallery service.

The main advantages for workers have been:

- access to an extra source of income;
- accumulating experience and skills;
- an opportunity to enlarge their client portfolio;

- building a professional reputation;
- reconciling work and family life.

However, the positive perception of workers depends on whether they also have stable employment (even part-time) or if working on platforms such as Adtriboo.com is their only source of income.

If it is the latter, the workers tend to mention quite a few disadvantages, especially the downward pressure that crowd employment puts on pay. Moreover, there are many non-accredited professionals on the platform which could drive down standards. Furthermore, presenting ideas on an open platform provides incentives for piracy. For example, can pick up useful ideas during the appraisal process and then decide not to pay for them. While this is prohibited in the platform's terms and conditions (Adtriboo, 2013), enforcing this rule is very difficult. One of the workers said that he saw a company using an idea he presented in a contest, after the contest had been declared unsuccessful.

The workers disagree on how to address such problems. One of them suggested greater restrictions on accessing the platform by, for example, requiring proof of a degree in creative design in order to register. However, others argued that the process works reasonably well and there is no need for any restrictions.

## **Commentary**

Crowd employment is a growing phenomenon in Spain. It gained momentum during the economic crisis of recent years. The growth has been most spectacular in the creative design sector, partly due to availability of a large number of young, skilled, and unemployed professionals. Another reason has been the financial problems of SMEs, which made the services of design studios difficult to afford. However, the development of crowd work should also be seen in the light of more profound transformations in the labour market. First of all, the use of web 2.0 resources by workers and companies has become increasingly common. Secondly, there is an overall proliferation of non-regular employment forms among highly skilled service sector professionals.

The overall assessment of Adtriboo.com management about the operation of the platform is very positive. There have been very few problems and conflicts between clients and workers and the high level of satisfaction of clients and workers has contributed to its good reputation among creative crowdsourcing platforms. As mentioned above, both the platform management and the clients have a very positive perception of the benefits and advantages of crowdsourcing for the economy and the labour market. However, trade unions and workers have a more mixed view and are concerned about the impact of crowdsourcing on working conditions for professionals in creative industries.

The impact of these platforms on the economy and the labour market is positive. SMEs gain access to a wide range of professional services, which enhance their competitiveness. (It is nonetheless important to note that clients of Adtriboo are not only SMEs but also some large companies). Creative design professionals can, moreover, access opportunities that otherwise would not be available to them. They also gain some income as well as building their project portfolio.

This analysis highlights two major problems with crowdsourcing: potentially worse working conditions and the illegitimate copying of ideas. It is not clear whether there is any safety net for workers involved in crowd employment and whether any collective agreement is applicable to them. The current interpretation is that self-employed workers are covered by the 2007 Self-Employed Statute. This is probably something legislators will have to deal with to ensure that crowd employment does not become yet another form of precarious employment. As for the

second issue, both clients and competitors are able to pirate ideas. Although this is forbidden, monitoring and enforcement are very difficult. Hence, further measures are needed to deal with this issue.

One issue that did not feature strongly in the interviews was the challenge that these platforms pose for the future of creative design profession. There is a threat of (potentially) unfair competition among those having an official diploma and those without any officially recognised skills. This may hinder skill acquisition in the economy and decrease the incentives for young people to invest in (formal) education.

## Information sources

### Websites

Adtriboo available at <http://www.adtriboo.com/en>.

Crowdsourcing.org available at <http://www.crowdsourcing.org/>.

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