

Crowdsourcing as a development method for solo group tour production

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Abstract

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<p>The thesis investigates the feasibility of crowdsourcing as a development method for producing group tours targeting solo travelers. Following the theories of service design, open innovation, and crowdsourcing, the research explored their integration into group tour product development.</p> <p>A quantitative survey was conducted with Finnish solo travelers to analyze their preferences, motivations, and willingness to engage in collaborative planning processes. The findings revealed that crowdsourcing would improve customer alignment, foster innovation and mitigate production risks for small and medium-sized tour operators. Motivational factors such as cost-sharing and social interaction emerged as key drivers for participation. However, challenges related to group dynamics and decision-making transparency were identified.</p> <p>The study provided actionable recommendations for leveraging crowdsourcing in solo group tour production, particularly for SMEs, to enhance their competitiveness and efficiency in an evolving market.</p>		
Keywords		
group tour, tour operator, group tour production, solo-traveller, innovation, open innovation, service design, crowdsourcing		

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1 Introduction

Innovation drives the competitiveness of the tourism industry. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Finland face challenges in adapting to changing customer preferences, especially in the growing solo travel market. Solo travel has evolved from being a niche trend to growing segment also among senior travelers. However, traditional group tour production often fails to meet their individualistic needs.

Crowdsourcing offers a novel approach, enabling companies to co-create travel experiences with their customers and more widely with individuals with an interest to the topic. By integrating customer insights into the planning process, crowdsourcing can enhance customer satisfaction and foster innovation in product development. This study explores how this method can be applied to solo group tour production, with Kristina Cruises Ltd as a case example.

Tourism innovation is often seen as a technological effort to improve the customer experience. In recent years, digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI) have rightly achieved popularity in the industry. Attention has been paid to improving the customer orientation of the service to some extent with service design and other user-centric methods. Customer needs, especially in the case of group tour productions are still to some extent not defined at an adequate level, especially in the wishes of the Finnish solo traveler.

Finnish small-group tour operators should review and reform their practices to gain a competitive advantage over larger international companies.

1.1 Background

The decision to travel involves a complex set of considerations and decision-making processes, influenced by personal preferences, external conditions, and available resources (Cook 2018, 54). Independent travelers, who manage their travel arrangements, benefit from various tools to plan and book services such as flights, accommodations, transportation and on-site activities. Recent advancements, especially AI have expanded these options, making customized travel planning more accessible to consumers.

Despite the of self-service tools, a significant share of travel bookings continues to be made through travel agents and tour operators. One important reason for this type of consumer behavior is the expertise and experience that professional operators bring as well as the professional tourism product safety provided by legislation. Travellers who decide to turn to

tour operators and join a group tour are most likely travellers who seek security, quality and are willing to invest in service.

Group tours are curated travel products that combine multiple services into a cohesive package, typically including transportation, accommodations, meals, and guided activities (Cook 2018, 116). These tours are sold to individuals or pre-defined groups and are designed to cater to leisure or business travelers, including those in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events (MICE) sector. A Group Tour Package (GTP) follows a prearranged itinerary and often serves as a significant revenue stream for travel agencies, with the market for such packages showing consistent growth (Peng-Sheng et al. 2021). Group tours vary in duration, inclusions, and themes. However, the operational risks remain high. The tour operator usually keeps the right to cancel any tour that will not have the adequate number of participants to cover the costs (Peng-Sheng et al. 2021).

This thesis focuses on the development of group tour production for leisure travelers, with potential applicability in the MICE sector. It specifically examines innovative methods focusing on crowdsourcing to meet the evolving needs of travelers.

The recent changes in society have increased the amount of single-population and solo consumption. A solo traveller is a person who makes independent decisions about traveling. Contemporary solo travel experiences have become popular, and studies show that solo travel is also a choice for travelers with friends and family (Yang 2020, 2461).

Solo traveling is popular among senior citizens. Senior citizen travel is estimated, by the U.S. Census Bureau, to be 1.3 billion by 2040 and it is estimated that this target group will grow seven times faster than other age segments. In addition to this the fact that a traveler over 65 years spends 30% more compared to younger travelers (Cook 2018, 63).

The increasing demand for solo travel, combined with the added value that group travel provides, makes solo group tours a promising area for development. Group tours offer solo travelers benefits such as cost-sharing, security, and opportunities for social interaction, making them an appealing choice.

Traditional group tour production often involves speculative planning, with itineraries designed years in advance based on estimated customer preferences. This approach risks mismatched offerings and default production, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with limited resources. Co-creation, where customers actively contribute to

the design process, offers a potential solution by aligning products more closely with actual demand (Stickdorn & Schneider 2012, 22).

Understanding the needs and motivations of solo travelers is critical for designing group tours for this segment. Detailed segmentation allows for more targeted services, reducing operational risks and increasing profitability. Traditional segmentation methods like geographic, demographic, psychographic and product-related characteristics, are insufficient for capturing the complexities of solo travel (Cook 2018, 63). Instead, psychographic segmentation, supported by frameworks such as Travel Career Patterns (TCP) and Sinus-Milieus lifestyle models, provides deeper insights into personality-driven travel preferences (Cook 2018, 57-65).

For instance, TCP identifies tourists along a spectrum of psychocentric (security-oriented) to allocentric (adventure-seeking) characteristics. Integrating these insights with sustainability expectations, particularly among younger and senior travelers, allows for the development of products tailored to the values and lifestyles of solo travelers and the Sinus-Milieus model categorizes individuals with two dimensions which are social status including education and income and basic values which allow to gain deeper understanding about the target group (Cook 2018, 65).

To address these challenges, crowdsourcing emerges as a viable method. By engaging diverse groups in the development process, crowdsourcing enables tour operators to harness customer insights and preferences, ensuring better alignment with market demands. This approach also democratizes innovation, making it accessible to SMEs and fostering customer loyalty through participatory planning.

1.2 Introduction to the industry context

The vocabulary in tourism is varied and often people not familiar with the industry and many have a somewhat imprecise understanding of the exact differences. The general understanding is that a tour involves traveling and tours are undertaken for various reasons of leisure or business reasons.

To differentiate any travel experience from a group tour it is useful to follow when defining a group trip the following:

The word tour, as defined by the United States Tour Operators Association, "a trip taken by a group of people who travel together and follow a pre-planned itinerary.

Tour packages include at least two of the following elements: transportation, accommodations, meals, entertainment, attractions, and sightseeing activities (Cook, 2018, 116).

1.3 Group tours

A group tour is a travel experience where individuals join the same or similar travel experience which consists of several services. Group tour operators work as intermediates for different service providers in the travel industry. Tour operators connect individual tourism suppliers' services available for travelers (Cook 2018, 109).

Group tour production takes a lot of resources and requires a good insight to the future customer needs. Service design and customer co-creation are crucial for the development of new services (Hong et al. 2018). Both methods are good tools to get an insight into the customer needs and help to develop the product portfolio. Dependent on the ability to meet customer needs efficiently the tourism service can be successful and profitable (Cook, 2018, 107).

In group travel, forecasting, cost management and service chain management play a particularly important role. The group travel industry is not just about meeting customer needs, but about strong demand forecasting and finding cost-effective solutions to the expected demand. In the case of a medium-sized operator, these solutions target hundreds of trips and thousands of consumers.

1.4 Solo travel

Solo travel is driven by diverse motivations and experiences. Individual's reasons to travel solo vary in their reasons and styles of traveling.

The U.S. Travel Association defines solo travellers as persons who live alone and travel without companion (Cook, 2018, 387). Solo travellers are in most cases single but might also travel independently regardless of their relationship's status.

The definition of solo travel is debated. Solo travelers can be categorized as individuals who travels alone throughout the journey or a traveler who starts alone but joins organized tours or groups.

Four types of solo travelers can be identified:

- Individuals living alone who travel alone.

- Individuals living alone who join a group or organized trip.
- Individuals not living alone but traveling alone.
- Individuals not living alone who travel alone but later join a group.

This classification underlines the heterogeneity of solo travelers, their travel motivations and their expectation for experiences.

Some solo travelers are driven by independence or self-discovery, others may dislike the company of others or have no immediate travel companions. Some start traveling independently by default and end up traveling solo by choice. The common motivator for solo traveling is escape from everyday life which can be seen as the main factor for any traveler. Some studies indicate that solo travelers have higher standards e.g. for accommodation and indoor locations. Solo travelers might also experience service not as friendly as accompanied tours due to cultural differences in the societal role of women and single supplements (Yang 2020).

Solo travellers, as all tourists, are both “pushed” to travel by personality traits or individual needs as the and wants the personal benefits of traveling, and “pulled” to travel by appealing attributes of travel destinations like the cultural heritage or exclusivity of a destination (Cook, 2018, 55).

Motivations for travel vary, certain common features among people travelling alone differ from travelers traveling with companions. Solo travelers share some common motivations with all travelers, such as exploration, relaxation, and adventure. However, their attitudes and travel behaviors often differ significantly from accompanied travelers traveling with another person. Within this target group, there are personalities with various needs and desires about traveling which are connected e.g. to values and lifestyle.

The assumption is that solo travelers are more individualistic about their travel planning. In addition to being individualistic solo travelers seek connection and interaction with other travelers. This is evident on social media social media groups for solo travelers.

Women solo travelers often seek personal growth, self-confidence, and empowerment. It is also worth noting that enabling women to travel alone complies with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 5 of gender equality (United Nations 2024). Most solo travelers are female and social media and internet search engines show high growth figures in searches with the search words solo, solo women travel, and women only.

Women often experience solo travel to break free from societal expectations and family roles. Other motivations include experiencing freedom in general, engaging and authentic adventures, enhancing well-being by reducing stress and promoting happiness.

Men focus more on external experiences such as engaging with nature, exploring new destinations, and seeking thrill through danger or adventure. They are more likely to pursue activities like sports, cultural events, and local arts (Oteigui-Carles et al. 2022, 733-734).

Studies show partly contradictory findings on the difference between solo and accompanied travelers. First-time solo travelers are more influenced by the opinions of their close circle. Solo travelers have higher quality expectations but they complain less often about their trips. The studies about tour lengths are controversial and some studies show that solo travelers take longer trips than accompanied tours are, others indicate the opposite. Many solo travelers like to meet other people. A part of solo traveling is also feeling lonely and sometimes unsafe.

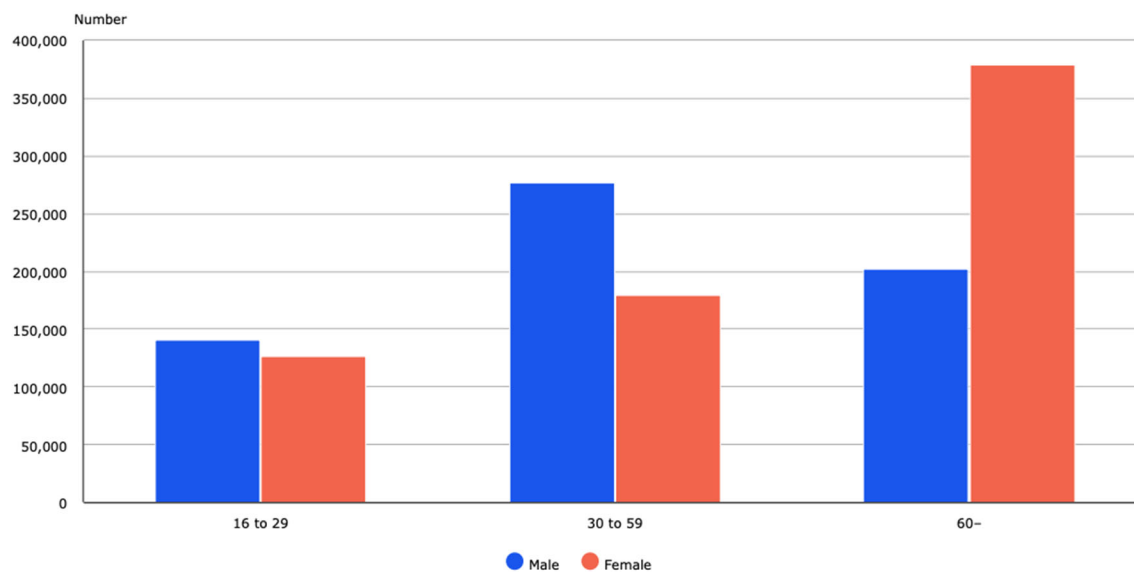
The majority of solo travelers make their plans and bookings on smartphones and share their experiences on social media. Nearly 70% of solo travelers seek for cultural and authentic experiences and many of them are adventurous but also more likely to participate in wellness activities. Over 50% want to experience the cultural heritage of a destination (World Metrics 2024).

The Maslow's hierarchy of needs will be an important factor in the development of solo tours. It is essential to clarify what needs at the minimum level have to be met as individualistic needs will most likely be a more significant factor in the solo traveler target group than to travelers traveling accompanied (Cook 2018, 74).

1.5 Solo traveling in Finland

Solo traveling has increased also in Finland although the statistics about the topic are limited. The popularity of Finnish solo traveler social media communities is growing.

It is expected that the growth in solo tourism will continue. There are approximately 1,3 million solo households in Finland. Over 1 million of these are in the age group over 30 years. According to Statistics Finland, the number of solo households has doubled since the 1990's and the number defined as small is nearly 80% of all households in Finland.



Source: Statistics Finland, dwellings and housing conditions

Figure 1. Persons living alone by age and sex 2022 in Finland (Statistics Finland 2024)

The author's estimation is that approximately 50% of Finnish solo households would be the potential population for traveling solo. This makes it a significant target group as the estimated number of Finnish outbound traveling was 7,3 million in 2023 (Statistics Finland 2024).

1.6 Rationales

Experience gained working in tour production since 2017 shows that group tour production in Finland is done traditionally. Tour ideas are developed, put into production, and published to be sold. A lot of time and effort has gone into guessing and estimating how future travelers want to travel, sometimes even years earlier. In the leisure group travel sector, the tour operator must find a group with the same desires and interests, with the same will of financial investment, wanting the same timing and duration for their holiday. The tour must be special enough to meet the needs of a segment, but general enough to be interesting for an adequate number of people to cover the required minimum number of passengers to be commercially viable and meet the required number of passengers for group pricing at airlines, hotels and other service providers.

The group travel industry in Finland is relatively small. According to Statistics Finland, the number of companies registered under the definition of Travel agency, tour operator and other reservation service and related activities is 2462 companies. The majority is small or medium-sized (Statistics Finland 2024).

The outbound travel market is dominated by big international operators. The proliferation of marketing channels and, the growing number and variety of channels and platforms available, has resulted in reaching the right customer has become increasingly challenging. Businesses must navigate diverse platforms and fragmented audiences to deliver targeted and impactful messages. Another challenge for the small Finnish tourism industry is the small Finnish population. This has led to a small target audience which often results in a service that is too unsegmented, thus the identification of the exact travel motivation of the customer becomes fragmented (Suni 2024.)

Resources of small tour operators in production, marketing and sales are wasted by competing for the same limited target group and the market share is small. As the margins in tour operating are relatively low, and group tours as a business contain a higher risk than the travel agency business, identifying the needs of the customer in a more personalized way is crucial.

Solo traveling has been growing already in the late 2010's due to structural changes in society and e.g. more individualistic lifestyles of women. The real boost to growth came after the Covid-19 pandemic as social distancing made it more desirable. This has been evident also in the increased solo traveler sales at Kristina Cruises production. It has become apparent that there would be more demand for solo trips than there is available supply. Kristina Cruises started already in 2021 promoting moderately to the target group with a slogan "Kristina Solo - travel independently but not alone!". The offering under this segment were some tours with a relatively low single supplement. The single supplement, especially on cruise ships is an issue for many willing to choose a single accommodation (Otegui-Carles et al. 2022).

All the above challenges and the author's desire to find a solution to the general problems of the sector in terms of profitability, risk management and meeting customer needs led to the choice of the topic. The idea of utilizing crowdsourcing in tour planning and the merging of solo tourism as one of the major target groups led to the choice of researching the suitability of the crowdsourcing method in solo group tour production.

1.7 Relevant company introduction

Kristina Cruises Ltd is a Finnish tour operator with a history of over 70 years. Established in 1953 as a fishing company, the organization transitioned in the 1980s to focus on Finland Lakeland cruising and later operated as a shipping company until the early 2000s. Kristina

Cruises evolved into a specialized group tour operator with a loyal client base, offering high-quality and customer-oriented travel experiences specialized in cruises.

During these years the company has experienced years of rapid growth in the 1990's to near bankruptcy in 2014. After corporate restructuring, followed by the Arabic Spring events, the company has focused on developing its tour operation business focusing on cruises. Following a comprehensive corporate restructuring, Kristina Cruises refocused its operations on river and ocean groups on cruises. Resilience has become a defining feature of its organizational culture which was further demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic. The company's efforts have been recognized through industry accolades, including being named Best Finnish Tour Operator in 2019 and again in 2022. (Partanen 2023.)

The global tourism industry has changed in recent years, the Covid-19 pandemic acting as a major disruptor. During the peak of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, Kristina Cruises leveraged public funding to advance its digital capabilities, enhance service production, and rebrand its offerings to better meet the evolving preferences of customers. Recognizing the risks associated with relying solely on cruise travel, the company diversified its product portfolio by launching a rail tour production line in 2021. This initiative aligned with rising consumer demand for sustainable travel options.

After the pandemic the risks in group tour operations have increased. High cancellation volumes during the pandemic, and in the immediate after followed Russian invasion to Ukraine, followed by inflation and high energy prices have affected group prices and booking conditions. Additionally, the 2023 conflict in the Middle East further exacerbated uncertainty in the European travel market. In Finland, the tourism sector has shown signs of recovery but remains below pre-pandemic levels, with consumer booking behavior characterized by caution, late reservations, and heightened sensitivity to risk.

To navigate these complexities, Kristina Cruises has focused on innovation. One identified gap in its operations is the insufficient understanding of customer needs, particularly in the context of group travel for solo travelers. Addressing this gap is critical, as traditional group tour production often relies on speculative planning and pre-defined packages that may not fully align with changing consumer expectations.

The company has explored methods such as service design and co-creation to better tailor its offerings to customer preferences. Among these approaches, crowdsourcing emerged as a tool for engaging customers and a wider audience directly in the design of group travel experiences. This approach matches Kristina Cruises' strategic objective to create more

personalized and competitive products while maintaining its reputation for quality and innovation.

The group travel segment is the core component of Kristina Cruises' business model, but it faces increasing risks in the current business environment. High cancellation rates, fluctuating booking behavior, and growing competition from international operators have added pressure to the company's operations. Securing stateroom allocations and accommodations for group tours, particularly in long-haul destinations, has become increasingly challenging. At the same time, consumer demand for group travel products is anticipated to grow as market conditions stabilize.

For Kristina Cruises, these challenges present an opportunity to innovate and redefine its approach to group tour production. Crowdsourcing offers an opportunity to engage with travelers in meaningful ways, allowing the company to co-create tours that meet the specific needs of solo travelers while addressing operational risks and optimizing resource allocation. With this method, Kristina Cruises seeks to strengthen its market position and enhance its capacity to adapt to changing customer behaviors.

This thesis follows Kristina Cruises' goals by exploring the feasibility of crowdsourcing as a development tool for group tour production. Specifically, it examines how crowdsourcing can address the needs of solo travelers which is a growing segment in the tourism market. By identifying the motivational factors and expectations of this target group, the research aims to provide actionable insights that will guide the company in refining its product development processes and securing its competitiveness in an evolving industry. As the current target group is mainly over 65 years old, the survey also provides an opportunity to look at the differences between this target group and the potential younger target group.

1.8 Objectives and research question

Developing a deeper understanding of consumer behavior, segmentation, and statistical probabilities is essential for creating effective customer insights. Anticipating changes in customer preferences and engaging customers in the development process is crucial for delivering high-quality services that align with demand. A high level of customer involvement not only enhances commitment to the service product but ensures its relevance and quality at the right time and for the right audience (Melander 2020).

The development of tourism services can be approached through various methodologies, with its advantages and limitations. In practical business applications, the suitability of a

method for the specific need is the priority over its precise theoretical definitions. Therefore, understanding the key elements of different approaches is vital for their effective implementation (Stickdorn & Schneider 2012).

This thesis explores crowdsourcing as a method for group tour production, focusing on its potential to create better experiences for solo travelers while providing additional value to tour operators. Crowdsourcing has been widely studied both as a tool for tourism content production and from the perspective of tourism destination development, but as a product development tool for SME tour operators, it is still underexplored.

The study aims to describe the core principles and features of crowdsourcing, as well as its similarities and differences compared to related methodologies such as service design and open innovation. By doing so, the research contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical applications of these methods.

1.9 Research Scope, Limitations and Objective of the Research

While technological solutions are an integral part of crowdsourcing, this thesis excludes detailed technological analyses from its scope. This approach ensures the study remains focused on the methodological aspects of crowdsourcing rather than its technical implementation. There are many platforms available and e.g. in its simplest form social media can be utilized to create a private crowd (Grier 2013, 191-195).

The main objective of this research is to evaluate whether crowdsourcing is a suitable method for group tour production targeting solo travelers and to identify the key motivational factors that encourage customer participation in a crowdsourced group tour.

The study bridges theoretical exploration and practical application by offering actionable insights for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism industry.

To achieve this objective, the research combines theoretical frameworks and practical considerations to answer the following questions:

1. Is crowdsourcing a viable method for producing group tours for solo travelers for small or medium-sized companies?
2. What are the essential elements and features of a crowdsourced group tour from the perspective of the solo traveler customer?

These questions are designed to provide actionable insights into how SMEs can utilize crowdsourcing to innovate in group tour production while addressing the preferences and expectations of solo travelers.

This thesis builds on existing literature in service design, open innovation, and crowdsourcing. These methods are widely acknowledged for their ability to enhance customer engagement and innovation in service production. Previous studies have established that customer involvement significantly increases loyalty and product relevance (Melander 2020). Crowdsourcing offers a participatory approach to co-creating services that align with customer needs.

By focusing on group tour production for solo travelers, this research extends the application of these methodologies growing segment of the tourism market. Solo travel is increasingly popular among travelers and represents a valuable target group for innovative service design. This study contributes to the field by combining theoretical insights with practical recommendations, ensuring the findings are both academically robust and directly applicable to SME operations.

2 From Service Design to Crowdsourcing: Service Development Approaches

This chapter provides context for the methodologies and concepts applied. It starts with a general overview of service development and innovation approaches in tourism and narrows down to the specificities of crowdsourcing as a method for solo traveler group tour production. The aim is to create a clear understanding of how these methods contribute to the development of customer-oriented and sustainable travel solutions.

2.1 Service Development in Tourism

Service development in tourism encompasses designing, enhancing, and innovating offerings to meet evolving customer needs. The development process involves forecasting demand, analysing consumer behavior, and ensuring cost efficiency. Successful service development requires collaboration among stakeholders and the integration of customer insights into the process (Stickdorn & Schneider 2012).

Service quality is a critical factor in tourism which affects customer satisfaction. The study by Parka and Jeong (2019) revealed that service quality is significantly influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty and are central themes of research today. The study emphasizes the importance of innovative approaches to developing tourism services (Park & Jeong 2019).

The methods discussed in this study—service design, open innovation, and crowdsourcing—share a common goal of creating customer-oriented services through collaboration and innovation. While each method has unique characteristics, they collectively highlight the importance of involving customers and stakeholders in service development to achieve sustainable competitive advantages.

2.2 Common characteristics and interconnectivity

All three methods, Service Design, Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing, have many common elements such as the involvement of external actors and thus the promotion of productivity and collaboration. In addition to similarities and interconnectivity, they also have specific features that make them easy to distinguish. All, especially open innovation and crowdsourcing are about pursuing information outflows and utilizing the information inflow (Tucci et al. 2018, 17).

Service design focuses on understanding customer needs, open innovation on seeking innovation from networks outside the organization, the goal of crowdsourcing is to harness the intelligence of many people. There is a strong connection between open innovation and crowdsourcing as innovation and idea generation can be crowdsourced (Grier, 2013, 293).

The figure below highlights the characteristics of Service Design, Open Innovation, and Crowdsourcing. All three approaches emphasize external collaboration and the involvement of external actors. All methods foster productivity and collective input.

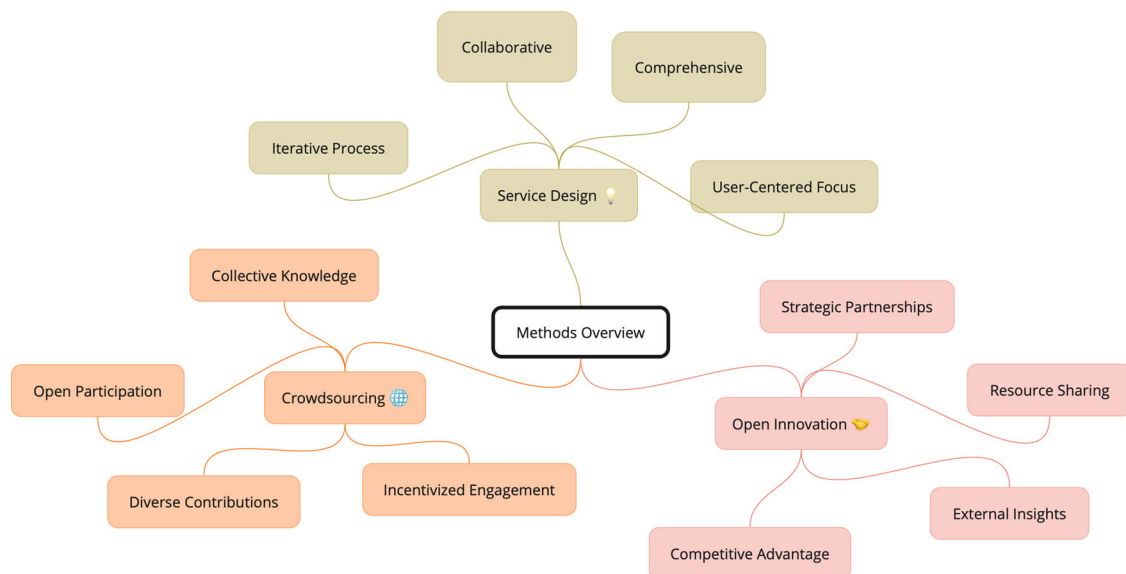


Figure 2. Specific features of Service Design, Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing

While service designing seeks continuous improvement based on user experience, open innovation seeks innovations, and crowdsourcing seeks to leverage crowd intelligence. All aim to evolve and innovate from the angle of each method, considering practical feasibility and aiming for innovation and improvement.

The below figure highlights the shared elements and interconnectivity of service design, open innovation and crowdsourcing.

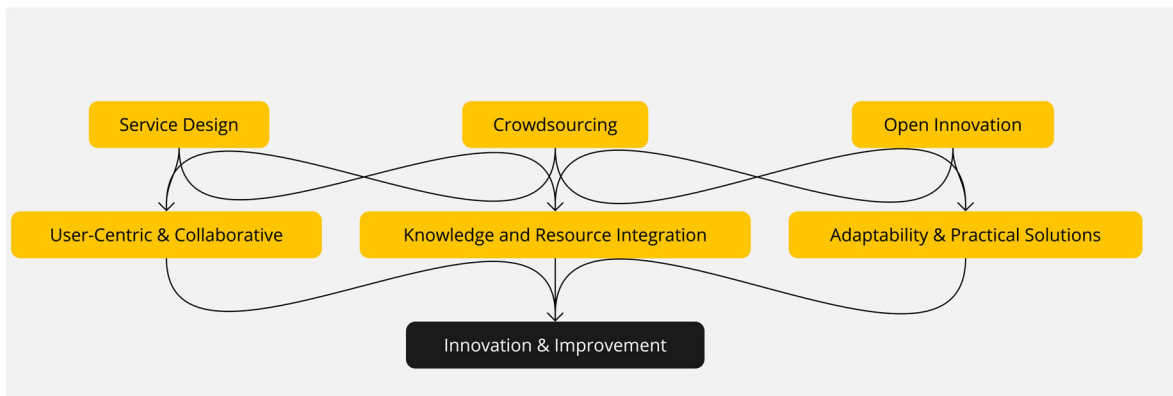


Figure 3. Common elements of Service Design, Open Innovation and Crowdsourcing

2.3 Service design

There is not one single definition of Service design (Stickdorn 2012, 18.) Service design focuses on user-centred and structured development creation or improvement of service and experience.

The process involves users and stakeholders of the service. Essential parts of the process are e.g. customer journey mapping, persona-definitions and service blueprints which aim to understand to understand the stakeholder and create services that meet the needs of consumers (Stickdorn 2012). The ideology has emphasized that service design is a mindset (Sangrioni & Prendiville 2017, 20).

The realisation that understanding customer needs, i.e. determining customer value, is an essential part of a successful business. Involving the customer in an open process is easier and more attractive in the service innovation phase. Today, service development is taking place in diverse time zones and on multiple levels. Services are creating complex service ecosystems and collaboration is increasingly multidisciplinary. This has created an opportunity for a more strategic approach to service innovation (Sangrioni & Prendiville 2017, 8-16).

The key characteristics of service design are:

1. Service design is about understanding the user and meeting the need of a specified user. It emphasises the user experience in the process of designing the service. Key

contribution to the research in service are gained through interviews, journey mapping. A special feature is the use of personas to develop an understanding of service needs.

2. Service design is an iterative process that might involve prototypes, testing with an idea of continuous improvement by user feedback.
3. Service design considers the entire service ecosystem, all touchpoints and interactions, to ensure a seamless and consistent experience across all interaction including all digital services.
4. Service design is inherently about collaboration to co-create solutions, ensuring the service is practical, feasible, and aligned with organizational goals and helps to create user-friendly, effective, and adaptable services for users and business needs.

The figure below illustrates the key principles and processes of service design. It highlights the user-centered approach. It shows how service design takes into account the whole service ecosystem to create a coherent and seamless user experience.

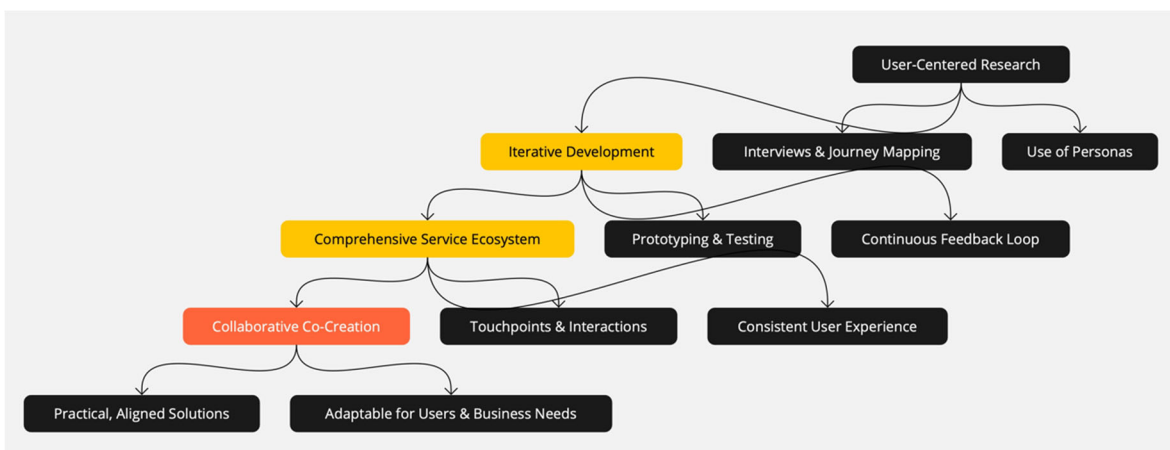


Figure 4. Visual Representation of Key Characteristics in Service Design

2.4 Open innovation

Innovation was long considered as a technological solution to improve effectiveness or new product-related areas. Innovation is about creating value from an invention (Open Stax 2024). Today the word innovation is also widely understood to comprise services and social

innovations. Innovations are all e.g. new products, services and new ways of doing things and its driver is a problem that requires solving and leads to change in behavior and are often defined as inventions that are commercialised (Torkkeli 2016, 91-94).

And innovation in its simplest form can be called something new that is something new that works and is useful and it works for some time. For a company, this should generate new business or improve profitability. It can be debated if a company orchestrating open innovation is open as it always involves a point of secrecy due to business objectives and the growing importance of knowledge management and information flow.

Innovation can be seen as a lifecycle where the idea is created to an invention that is implemented and has an impact. This is called the 4i -model of innovation (Torkkeli 2016, 93).

The below figure shows how innovation begins with the generation of an idea, which is the foundation for creating an invention. The invention is implemented, and transformed into a tangible or operational solution. The cycle culminates in the impact phase. This iterative model describes the interconnected nature of these stages and their eventual evolving to value creation.

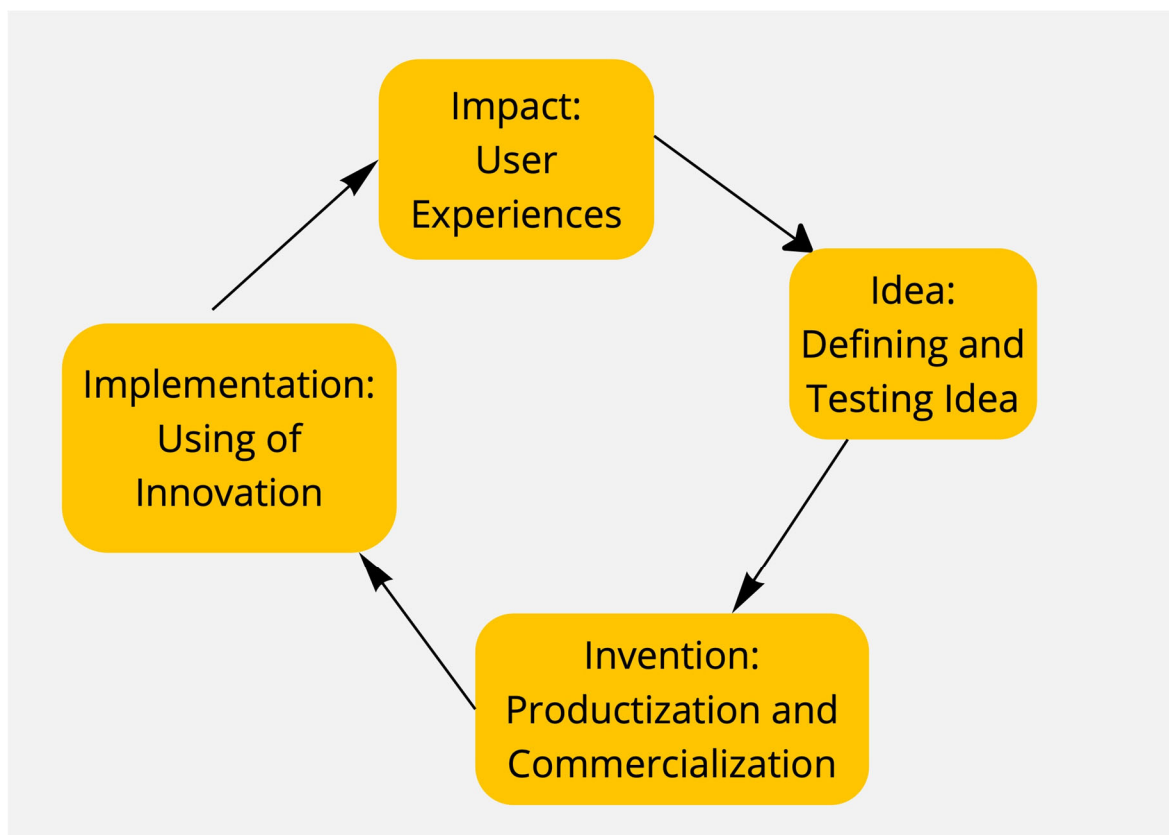


Figure 5. 4i model of innovation

Open innovation was introduced by Henry Chesbrough in 2003. He highlighted how companies could through an open process gain competitive advantage through outside knowledge, talent and technologies. In his book *Open Innovation: The New Imperative for Creating and Profiting from Technology* he described how strategy is necessary to prioritize and how market selection and development as well as value propositions should be supported by development of resources to recognize the incremental and radical innovations in the market. (Torkkeli 2016, 68-69.).

Chesbrough defined an open innovation in the following way:

Open innovation refers to the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation, to expand the markets for external use of innovation. (Torkkeli 2016, 68.)

The changed mindset of customers and partners encountering has in the recent year pushed academia and modern organisations to reflect on how open innovation can support to adapt to the fast changes and how to adjust to the change. As businesses have become more internationally networked the importance of interconnected Open innovation is becoming a key factor for success to stimulate knowledge sharing and facilitate innovation creation. Open innovation is often driven by the fact that companies today have to develop their products with extremely limited resources and the limited resources are particularly relevant to the business activities of SMEs and in economies that are networked in turbulent market situations (Torkkeli 2016, 113-117).

Although services have been disregarded in the studies of Open innovation studies have shown that open innovation can be especially successful when focusing on substance-free development. A key success factor of open innovation is the involvement of the end-user and the management of diversity. The essence is to create an open environment for opinions to be transferred to opportunities that create value through correct orchestration supported by optimized observations. The willingness to engage and optimism are the keys to achieving a sustainable impact (Torkkeli 2016, 5-17).

An important aspect of open innovation is the intellectual property right of an innovation created in an open process. It is argumental that real benefits of open innovation come through industry problem-solving, co-creation and the shift to a common modern economy or is business always or is open innovation a paradigm in business as the basic purpose of companies is to compete (Torkkeli 2016, 21-27).

The key characteristics of open innovation characteristics are:

1. Open innovation is a model for organizations to use internal and external ideas and resources to improve competitiveness.
2. Open innovation focuses on collaboration and knowledge sharing across organization boundaries including with partner companies, institutions and individuals.
3. Open innovation is typically a strategic partnership involvement with licensing agreements and co-creation projects.
4. Open innovation aims to accelerate the business by integrating insights from internal and external resources that can be defined.

The figure below illustrates the core principles and practices of open innovation. The most important features are collaboration and knowledge sharing across organizational boundaries, involving partners as companies, institutions, and individuals. The primary goal of open innovation is to accelerate business growth by integration of insights and expertise from diverse sources, internally and externally.

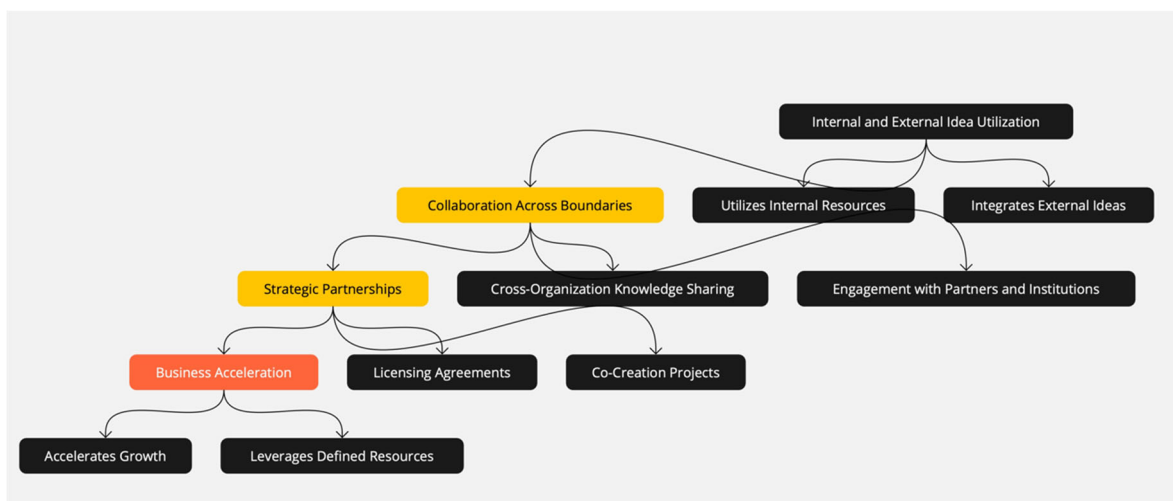


Figure 6. Visual Representation of Open Innovation Key Characteristics

2.5 Crowdsourcing

Compared to service design, which was already present in the academic literature in the 1980s, Crowdsourcing is a relatively new method. It appeared in academic literature in early

2000's. J. Howe defined in 2006 being "the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined and generally large network of people in the form of an open call." Reichwald & Piller 2006 defined it to be an Interactive creation of values: collaboration between the organization and the users in the development of a new product (Lenart-Gansinieć 2022, 4-5). As a new method crowdsourcing is seen as hard to define and Lenart-Gansinieć suggests that it would be defined as a way of engaging a non-specified group on an online platform to obtain benefits (Lenart-Gansinieć 2022, 6).

Most commonly the method used to outsource with crowdsourcing is to provide a challenge or problem to be solved by a large and unknown group. Crowdsourcing can be briefly distinguished from traditional outsourcing by a few main features. In outsourcing, the problem is solved on a contractual basis with a defined entity. In crowdsourcing, the aim is to benefit the collective mind (Hossfeld et al. 2014). It is seen as a production model that takes places in a virtual community which makes it possible to utilize the knowledge of a collective intelligence (Lenart-Gansinieć 2022, 4).

Utilizing crowdsourcing requires also taking into consideration the aspects of the participant, the platform and the organization as well as the phases of preparation, initiation, generation, evaluation, and implementation (Lenart-Gansinieć 2022, 6). For many organizations, crowdsourcing is an opportunity to achieve or increase competitive advantage. During the definition evaluating crowdsourcing is essential. Although it has a lot of advantages crowdsourcing initiatives also frequently fail, but the conducted research allowed us to recognize that it is possible to measure crowdsourcing results using quantitative and qualitative indicators (Lenart-Gansinieć, 2022, 3).

Crowdsourcing characters are:

1. Crowdsourcing exploits the collective knowledge, ideas and skills of a large group to generate ideas and solve problems or to finalize tasks. The group is often undefined and collected through open calls or online platforms
2. Crowdsourcing engages a wide and diverse audience to participate. It might involve incentives or rewards and recognition
3. Crowdsourcing contributions are diverse, and outcomes might not be achievable with a traditional team or product development process. Typically, the crowd is motivated by idea submissions and contests.

- Crowdsourcing involves usually people or organizations contributing independently without a relationship with the organisation.

The figure below highlights the essential characteristics of crowdsourcing which leverages the collective knowledge, skills, and creativity of a large and often undefined group of individuals. This figure illustrates the dynamic and collaborative nature of crowdsourcing and its ability to harness diverse inputs for innovative solutions and tasks.

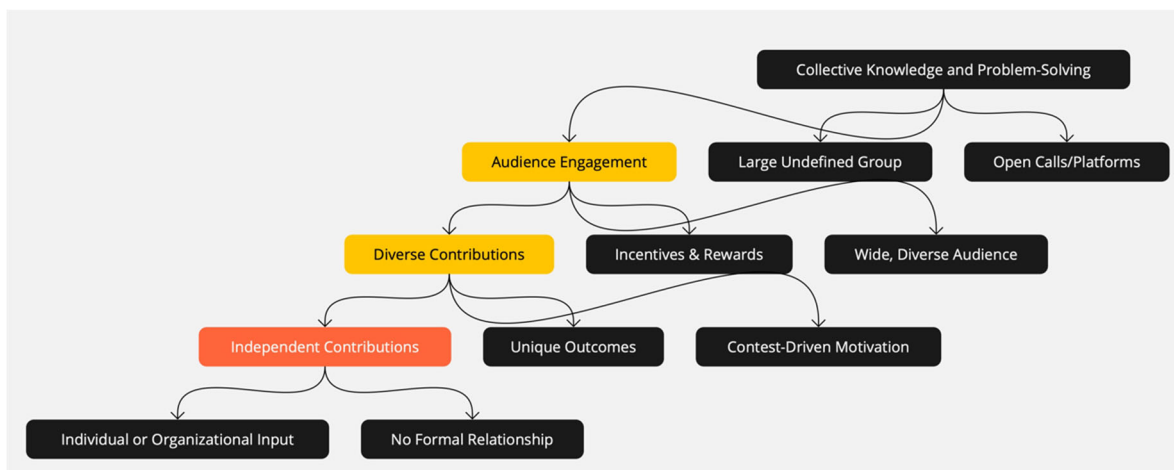


Figure 7. Visual Representation of key characteristics of crowdsourcing

2.6 Crowdsourcing principles

Crowdsourcing is a viable tool for development. Regardless of the challenge, the objective of crowdsourcing is to engage a large group of people from around the globe or individuals' creative mind crowdsourcing is a powerful tool. The basic principle is that the objective of solving a problem or handling a task is not an internal process but open to external participants (Tucci et al. 2018, 11). The crowd can be sourced for many different purposes from creating a new innovative product to transcription or fundraising and their motivation for participation varies e.g. from exploiting underused personal skills or the possibility to avoid tasks that someone dislikes or personal development.

For crowdsourcing organizations, the crowd usually offers e.g. access to need-driven competence and better flexibility as tasks can be split into smaller parts, reduced costs and the capability to process large amounts of data and the power of a divided workforce. The value

crowdsourcing delivers is based on the crowd's heterogeneity (Tucci et al. 2018, 15). For individuals, it offers e.g. the opportunity to create their vision. Crowdsourcing has, thus of its benefits of removing obstacles of time, place and creativity, it involves a reliability challenge that must be taken into account. (Grier 2013, 11-15).

The crowdsourcer is the organization or person creating and managing the process of crowdsourcing defines the goal, designs how the crowd will be engaged, publishes the task and finds the public to be crowdsourced. When the crowd is found the crowdsourcer needs to manage the process and finally collect the results and evaluate them (Grier 2013, 19). Good analytical skills and the capability to find the right people for the job are essential. All aspects of good leadership apply to a crowdsourcer, respect and transparency to mention some. (Grier 2013, 222-230)

Crowdsourcing has five identifiable forms which all have their purposes and rules. Any type of crowdsourcing involves a platform for crowdsourcing which is called a crowd- or contest market. A crowdsourcing project involves an includes the idea of compensation which can be a wide range of things. This is not necessarily a financial exchange but can be status. collaboration or satisfaction of being a part. The market type is defined by the type of project, and they include a possibility to promote projects, find specific skills and a payment service. These market i.e. platforms are usually specialized in a certain type of crowdsourcing or field and have different rules and fees (Grier 2013, 204). Contest- and self-organized crowds work in a contest market, macro- and micocrowds work in a contract market. Pre-certified crowds would help to manage critical and quality work (Hossfeld et al. 2014).

A crowdcontest is a very simple way of crowdsourcing for the crowdsourcer. The crowd tries to solve the same challenge of generating a new idea with very few guidelines This method is useful for quick development needs and might be beneficial to the participant even if they don't win. Central to this approach is that the best solution wins a prize. In this type of crowdsourcing the task is do divided, so the importance of the worker is the importance of the individual worker or team is highlighted as the moment of selection. This is an ideal method to generate new ideas (Grier 2013, 61-62). In the case of a contest, it is important to describe the how the results will be published, what are the contest rules and how intellectual property will be protected (Grier 2013, 68-69).

Macrotasking with crowdsourcing means dividing a task in large entities and sourcing for every entity a crowd that is specialized in the field for a relatively short time. In this case the

crowd might even be one person with the special skill needed. Macrotasking is often associated with freelance work online called elancing. This type of crowdworking is usually involved with a high level of expertise.

Microtasking means dividing a task into small pieces and engaging a larger crowd but for smaller, more specialized tasks e.g. checking reviewing and verifying. This type of crowdsourcing requires the capability to define small exact tasks that are independent, have a large volume and need a human to do it (Grier 2013).

In Self-organized crowds the task is divided by the crowd and requires from the crowdsourcer the ability to give the project to the crowd and hand over the decision-making power. This form of crowdsourcing is the most innovative and useful for inventing and creating something new. Although the group of people usually has an initiator, it involves a team benefitting from each other's knowledge, the collective intelligence, to gather information or ideas to support decision making e.g. outcomes being determined through votes. This type can also be used, for example, in scenario thinking and forecasting the future market situation. In this type of crowdsourcing, it is essential to motivate the participants to avoid poor performance or abortion and to clarify the boundaries between betting and prediction.

Crowdfunding to raise funds, whether for business or charitable purposes. Funding might be targeted to a project, product, or venture. Crowdfunding aims to collect contributions from many people, typically via online platforms.

Working with crowdsourcing involves always several people but they don't necessarily work together. Only in the case of self-organized crowds require the crowd to collaborate and work together towards a solution but this doesn't this does not exclude the possibility of cooperation in all five forms of crowdsourcing. (Grier 2013, 20-28).

The crowdsourcer can manage the crowd in various ways. After registering the task to a market platform that has the suitable crowd and the best possible team to solve the problem. Essential is that the task is clearly instructed and has guidelines and adequate training to the task. In some cases, regular meetings and dialogue during the task are necessary to ensure the right kind of progress. Instead of managing the crowd self the project management can be outsourced to a professional service provider.

Working as crowdworker is relatively easy and does not require a long-term commitment. Workers register at a market, basically on a web platform, verify their skills and choose their

task. After completing the task a crowdworker submits the required work and gets the agreed salary or other type of reward. Crowdworkers often work anonymously but with an earned reputation. For some tasks the crowd worker writes a proposal, shares a CV and writes a cover letter justifying their skills and knowledge suitable to the task. In practice, employees perform the role without a long-term commitment and a broader understanding of the employer's business objectives. Loyalty exists among crowdworkers towards tasks but its mainly connected to personal satisfaction with the task or good reputation connected to the task. (Grier 2013, 30-34).

The crowd and the crowdsourcer meet on platforms where both are registered. One posts the task and the other registered as an employee. The encounter can happen in one of two ways: the project is interesting enough for the employees to apply for a share in the project and the person expresses their willingness to participate in the project. The person's skills are specific, and the applicant accepts him or her as part of the team or, in some cases to carry out the project. (Grier 2013)

Crowdwork is involves compensation for the work. Crowdsourcing platforms usually have a fee for posted tasks and for rewards. The type, amount and level of compensation to the worker is entirely dependent on the nature of the project and the method of crowdsourcing. In some cases, no monetary compensation is involved. Attractivity of the crowdproject is the scale and attractiveness of the project determines how much compensation is needed, i.e. an inspiring project can attract authors at a low cost for its novelty value and reputation, the compensation for dealing with performing-level material is monetary. Compared to traditional outsourcing can crowdsourcing be a cost-efficient solution if the project is well-constructed (Hossfeld et al. 2014). In the case of a contest, it is important to describe the how the results and how intellectual property will be protected (Grier 2013, 68).

The figure below visualizes the structure and workflow of crowdsourcing. It shows how tasks are distributed and results collected through collaborative engagement. The process begins with the crowdsourcer, who identifies tasks and posts them on a crowdsourcing platform. These tasks are shared with the crowd in various formats like crowdcontests, macro- and micro tasking, self-organized crowds and crowdfunding. After the crowd has finalised the tasks the results are collected. This figure highlights the decentralized nature of crowdsourcing and its ability to collaborate with diverse participants and task execution.

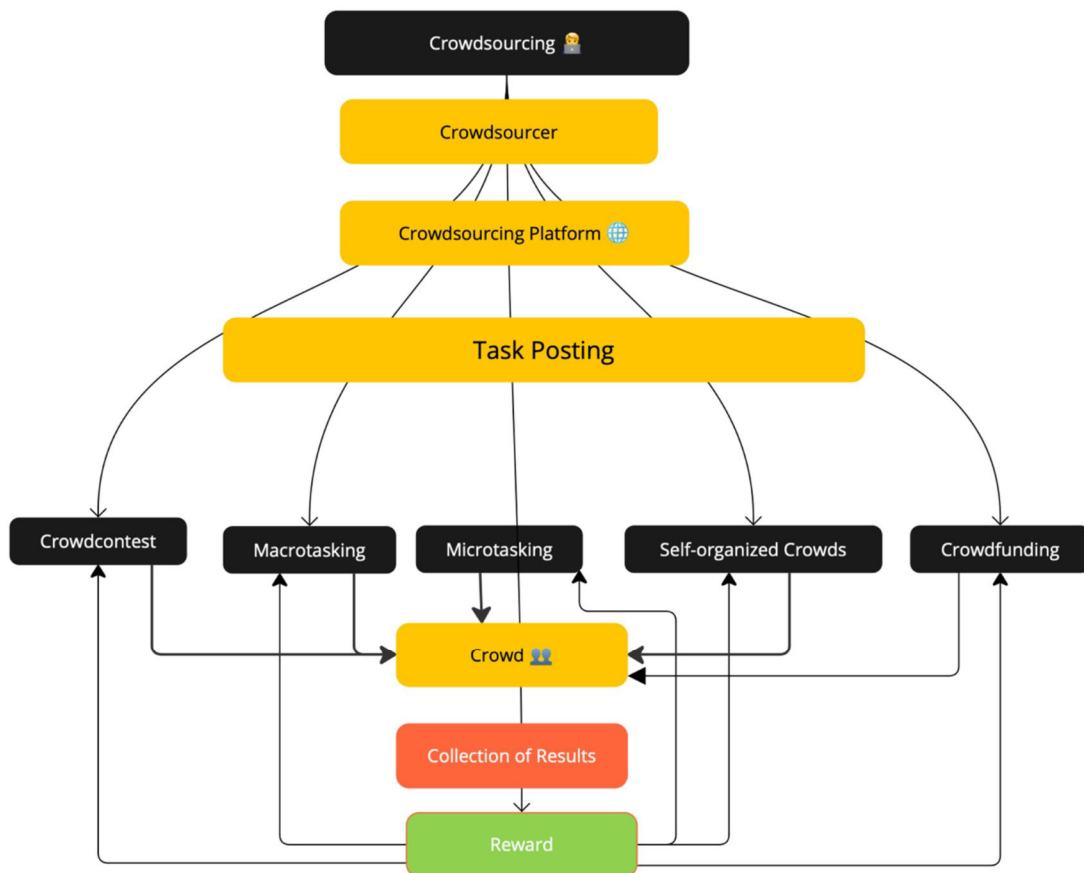


Figure 8. Elements of crowdsourcing

A crowd contest is considered to be an open innovation (Grier 2013). Crowdsourcing can be used in many different phases of innovation like idea generation, refining, testing and deployment (Grier 2013, 293).

Working with crowdsourcing for innovation, project implementation, problem-solving, data-collection and processing is possible. However, it is important to note that using this method requires a clear vision of the need, the right crowd and careful assessment of the results. It requires engagement and financing in all forms depending on the scope of the project.

Through crowdsourcing an organization can get a diverse and more expertise result than with the knowledge within the organization or its stakeholders. Crowdsourcing involves the same obligations as human resource management. Good employer ethics and an understanding that crowd working on the project are individuals (Hossfeld et al. 2014). Before

starting a project, it is vital to understand all the layers of crowdsourcing to be able to organize and manage the process (Hossfeld et al 2014). Crowdsourcing should be a cycle of continuous improvement with a variety of layers and can have parallel or serial workflows (Grier 2013, 261-263.).

Notable is that with crowdsourcing there exists a risk of low-threshold self-assessment, and opportunistic behavior, and the quality of problem-solving might be low. The value of the result relies also on the attribution of the problem. It must also be taken into account that the word group and crowd have a different meaning. A group is identified and persons belonging to it acknowledge each other whereas a crowd can be totally unconnected. (Tucci et al. 2018).

3 Research

3.1 Methodology

The decision to employ a qualitative research approach in this study is driven by the need to explore dimensions of solo travelers' experiences. Solo travel is a personal activity influenced by a variety of psychological, cultural, and situational factors that cannot be captured through quantitative methods alone. The unique characteristics and diversity of this target group require a research design that allows us to understand motivations, behaviors, and perceptions.

The quantitative method is valuable for identifying broad patterns and trends. Survey data may show that safety is a significant concern for solo travelers, but it does not explain how individuals perceive and navigate these concerns in their specific contexts. Solo travelers' decision-making processes, coping mechanisms, and the role of their identities in shaping their travel experiences require open-ended exploration to fully understand their implications.

Qualitative research is well-suited to addressing the growing interest in solo travel among diverse demographic groups. By focusing on the lived experiences of solo travelers, this study aims to provide actionable insights that can inform both academic theory and practical applications in the travel industry.

This qualitative approach enables the study to:

- Uncover personal motivations and the emotional dimensions of solo travel.
- Explore the decision-making processes of solo travelers.
- Identify the challenges faced by solo travelers.

To ensure the reliability of the research, the key metrics were the identification of common patterns in motivations, challenges, and emotional responses and of a broad demographic range to ensure perspectives and varied experiences.

3.2 Constructing the Survey

The quantitative survey targeting the target group was carried out with an online questionnaire following the guidelines of Business research methods (Bell et al. 2018). The online questionnaire made data storage and analysis efficient. The objective of the survey was to collect adequate data from approximately 50 to 100 participants recruited from social media groups that focus on solo travel.

The research design was carefully planned, from defining the research problem to reporting the results. To secure the right target groups, an analysis of the targeted group's demographics, attitudes, and lifestyles was defined (Hair et al. 2020.)

The Finnish online survey tool Zef was chosen for the survey to ensure the comparability, reliability, and validity of the data. The Zef survey tool also allowed analysis of comparing different respondent profiles with each other online.

The survey was conducted in two languages. The Zef survey tool allows reporting with the same content and comparability regardless of the language of response. This ensured that the target group, which is mainly Finnish-speaking, would not fail to respond and that the reporting would be in English according to the thesis reporting requirements.

The survey was stratified so that in addition to the demographics, the preferences, attitudes and aspirations of the respondents were explored to support the Travel Career Patterns personality characteristics and lifestyle segmentation.

Following the guidelines of Bell et al. (2018), and Hair et al. (2020), the anonymity and privacy of the study participants have been ensured and no contact details of individuals were collected.

The research was targeted at solo travelers. The survey was carried out following the principles of crowdsourcing, taking account of the following principles:

- To ensure the most compatible audience for the survey the recruitment of the crowd was targeted on social media groups dedicated to Finnish solo travelers. The target group was selected based on competencies in solo traveling and targeted to a group that was sufficiently broad and unspecified (Grier 2013, 201).
- In addition to general demographic questions the questionnaire included questions that take account to Travel Career Patterns (TCP) personality characteristics. The

TCP is a concept that explores how travel motivations and preference evolve in different life stages. This includes i.e. the drivers for travel and how previous experiences shape the preferences in the future (Cook 2018, 57-59).

- In formulation of question the basics of Sinus-Mileus lifestyle segmentation to get insights into different lifestyles, values and attitudes. This allows for a more accurate target group analysis and helps to understand what motivates different groups and how to make use of them for effective product development (Cook 2018, 65).

The questionnaire included 26 questions. The questions 1 to 15 were profiling the demography, TCP personality and lifestyle segmentation of the respondents and attitudes to group travel. Questions 16-28 focused on the willingness to participate, specific wishes about the process and level of contribution.

The results are reported in accordance with Hakala's (2000) recommendation for scientific rigor and clarity, combining visuality and clear description.

According to Hirsijärvi et al. (1997) and Hirsijärvi & Hurme (2001), the reporting is logical, and the conclusions are research-based and transparent.

A feature for crowdsourcing is a crowd-connected online tool. This survey will not address the technological issue. This research was solely concentrated on the question if the method that can be used for solo group tour production and what are the required elements and essential features from the solo traveler customer perspective. However, respondents were asked about their preferred way of working together to ascertain the level of readiness of this target group to work in digital environments.

3.3 Qualitative survey

The core of this research was to define if the solo travelers would be willing to participate in the crowdsourced planning process and what the motivation and possible constraints and obstacles for participation in a crowdsourced tour would be.

To ensure the sample size is adequate and compatible to the significance of the research the following were defined:

- estimated population for solo traveling in Finland is 50 % of solo households which is 650 000 (p)
- desired confidence level 95% (Z)

- Margin of error 10% (E)

By defining these it is possible to determine the desired sample size (n.) with the qualtrix.com tool resulted in optimal sample size of 97 respondents.

To ensure the questionnaire reaches the target audience and the respondents' level of expertise and commitment as a consumer traveler is as high as possible, the invitation to take part in the survey was with permission from social media group administrators. In addition to the leisure travel solo traveling groups the author posted the invitation on her personal Facebook page.

The survey link was shared on October 29th 2024 in the following Finnish social media groups targeting consumer solo travellers.

- Matkaseuraa maailmalle 21 500 members
- Soolomatkoilijat 6900 members
- Matkaseuraa maailmalle +40v. 4 800 members
- Matkaseuraa naisille 50+ 1 800 members.
- Kristiina matkaajat 2 200 members

Member numbers retrieved from the groups on 8.11.2024. Although on LinkedIn there are over 3500 hits with the search of solo travel it was excluded from the survey due to the professional profile of group members.

In this survey the Multiple-Choice Question model was mainly used in framing the questions in addition to a few open-ended response types. This was chosen to maintain comparability and comprehensibility as unambiguous as possible in the reporting data. To secure that the target group of Finnish solo travellers answered the survey was published in bilingual form English and Finnish allowing comparison of responses regardless of the language in which they were answered.

3.4 Analysis

The survey targeted solo travelers to gather quantitative data on their preferences for group tours and crowdsourced travel experiences. A total of 125 valid responses were collected from Finnish and English-speaking participants.

Before analysis the dataset was reviewed for completeness, with incomplete responses excluded.

Numerical coding was applied for categorical variables to facilitate statistical analysis.

Responses were categorized based on the survey structure, focusing on demographics, preferences, and attitudes towards crowdsourcing.

The quantitative data was analysed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The aim was to summarize demographic and preference patterns among solo travellers and identify relationships between key variables, such as travel frequency and attitudes toward crowdsourced tours.

Frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarize the gender, age, and geographical distribution of respondents.

Trends such as solo travel frequency, group preferences, traveler type and preferences of itineraries and destinations as well experience and preference especially in the field of group travel investigated. Openness to crowdsourcing and preferences about participation were highlighted.

The analysis aimed to test hypotheses based on the survey's objectives:

- Does travel frequency vary significantly across age groups?
- Do results reveal significant differences with older participants (65+) compared to younger travelers?
- Is openness to crowdsourcing influenced by past group tour experiences?
- Is the importance of itinerary personalization linked to travelers' control preferences?

To ensure data quality and robustness responses with over 20% missing information were excluded to maintain dataset reliability. Open-ended responses provided in Finnish were translated to ensure inclusivity and accuracy.

Data was anonymized and securely stored to maintain respondent privacy. Participation was voluntary, and no identifiable information was collected, aligning with ethical research standards.

To facilitate a clear and intuitive presentation of the survey results, pie charts were utilized to visualize categorical data. These visualizations provide an overview of the proportions and distributions within key variables, such as demographic characteristics, travel preferences, and attitudes toward crowdsourcing.

4 Findings

The survey was shared on October 29th and closed on November 19th 2024. The comprehensive survey report is included in Appendix 1.

The survey of 28 questions was opened by 191 and was answered by 125 respondents. This was, according to the sample size calculation formula above, sufficient to give a reliable result. Notable is that all not all respondents answered all questions.

The survey results indicate that solo travelers' frequency does not vary across age groups but older generations highlight the preference for safety and structured itineraries. The majority, 80%, has participated in a group tour and in both younger and in the +65 age group the willingness to engage in crowdsourcing was similar. The consensus percentage of the respondents was relatively low, only 50%, which indicates that the solo travelers have individualistic needs that have to be addressed through flexible and enabling product design.

4.1 Demography and preferences of solo travel

Most respondents, over 82%, were women and their residency was by 99% in Europe. Due to the relatively low response rate of male and non-gender respondents, the results are not widely analysed based on gender differences in preferences, although statistics show that preferences are often related to gender. Notable is that consensus percentage in this survey was 50%, which shows how similar respondents are to average in the survey. This shows that different respondents may have very individual needs that fit well with the profile of solo travellers.

The survey solicited responses from solo travellers. Of the respondents 44.9% reported to be traveling solo between one and two times a year, 37.30% occasionally and 17.8% more than five times a year. From the Age group 35 to 44 years 47 % said they travel 1 to 2 times a year solo and 43% travel 3 to 5 times solo a year. The older group from +65 years solo travelers had a similar travel density even though the available free time is essentially higher.

The responses showed that many respondents had no preference as to which gender group they traveled with and only 2.5%, all women, indicated that they would like to travel with a same-sex group. Surprisingly there was no difference between the preference in between the + 35 or +65 group in preference about the preference but comparing the rarely traveling group and the frequently travelling group the consensus about having no preference about

the group type was essentially higher than between those who travel less frequently which indicated that those who travel more frequently are more flexible in terms of group gender.

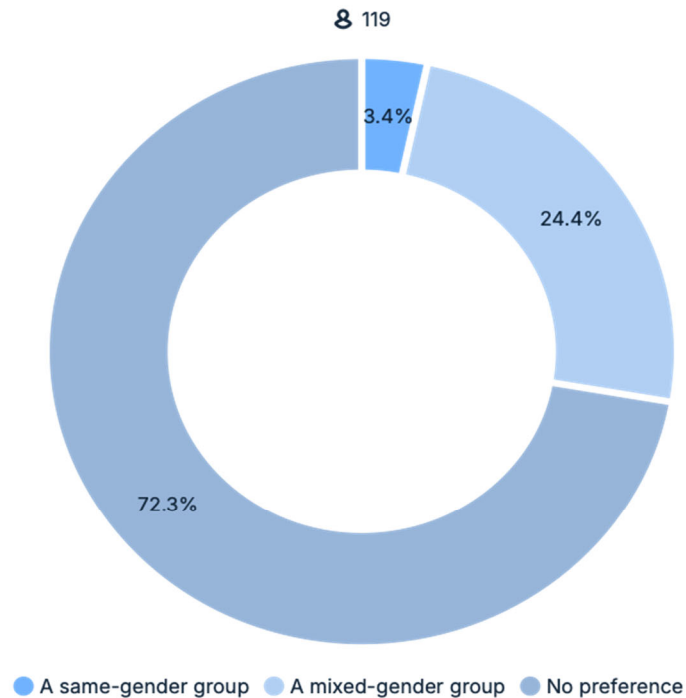


Figure 9. Gender preferred to travel within a group by solo travelers

When asked to categorize their type of traveller 68% said they were relaxation and leisure traveller, 36% a culture enthusiast, 32% an adventure seeker, and 9% in the business and other categories. Notable is that some weren't able to categorize their solo traveling but replied it to be dependent of the situation. Over 88% of the age group 35 to 44 replied to categorize themselves as a relaxation or leisure traveller. In this age group all those who travel more than 5 a year categorized themselves to this category which indicates that relaxation is an essential feature for occupied solo travelers. Compared to the same number of tours taken by +65 only 60% replied to categorize themselves to relaxation and leisure travelers.

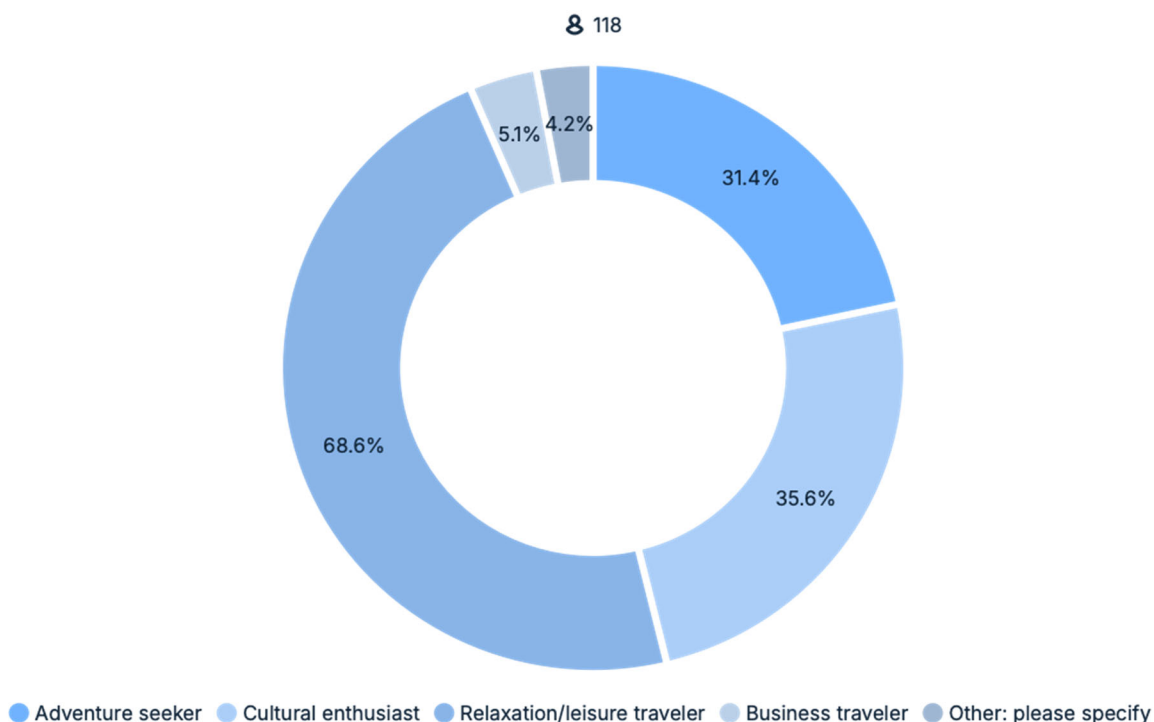


Figure 10. Category of traveler type

57% of respondents said they prefer to visit familiar and new destinations when travelling and 43% prefer to choose a new destination. Expectedly 100% of persons who categorized themselves as adventure seekers enjoyed exploring unknown and adventurous destinations and a mix of structured activities and free time. Of the age group over 65 69% enjoy a balance between familiar and new destinations. When asked about the preference about their preferences for a travel itinerary, 65% of all respondents said a combination of pre-planned and leisure was the best option.

The motivation for going on a trip was the travel experience for 78% of respondents and around 13% said they travel for socializing and meeting people. Of adventure seekers who prefer to explore 91% said they enjoy meeting new people but mostly travel for the experience which indicates that solo travelers who are open to adventure and unknown destinations are also more open to meeting new people which is slightly higher than the percentage share of +65-year-old solo travelers who categorized themselves as cultural enthusiast and relaxation and leisure travelers whose percentage share in this category was 71%.

The survey examined the preferences about the level of structure in the travel itinerary. Only 10 % said they enjoy a fully planned itinerary and 90% enjoy a mix of structured program and freed time or a minimal structure as the over +65-year-old group preferred a fully planned and structured itinerary by 18%.

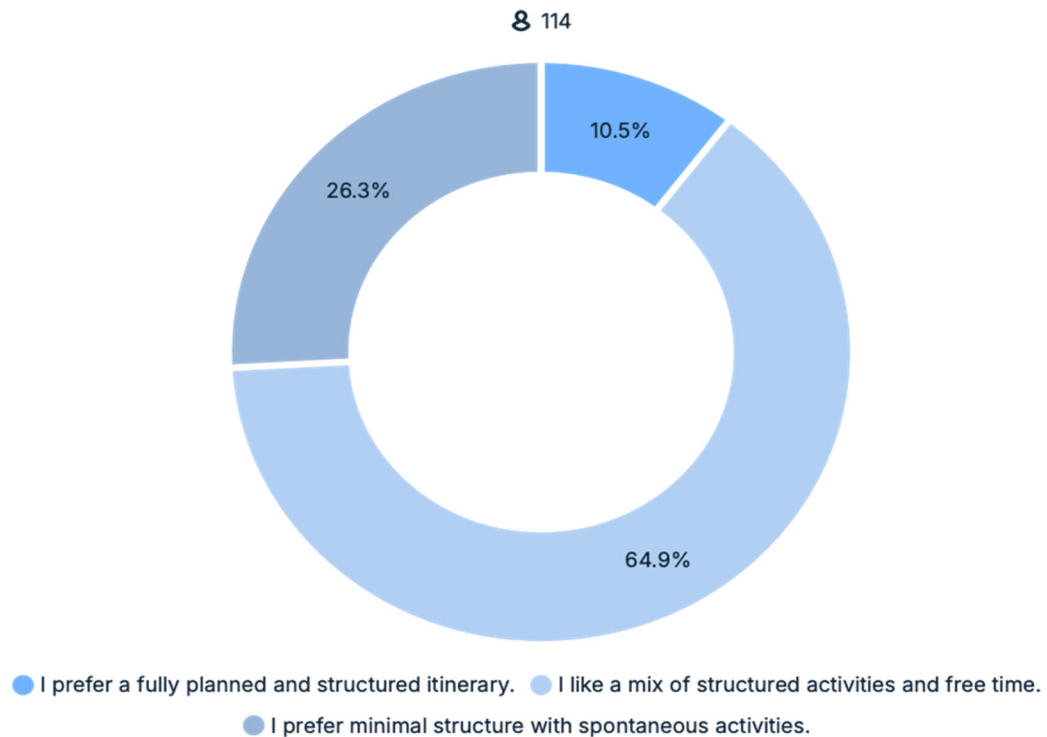


Figure 11. Preferred level of structure in a travel itinerary

The main reason to travel is to experience, but 76% said they like in addition to meet new people. Actively seeking for opportunity to socialize were 12,5%. There were very little difference in preferences between younger and the + 65 solo travelers preferences although only 3% in this age group said they preferred travelling alone with no interaction with others.

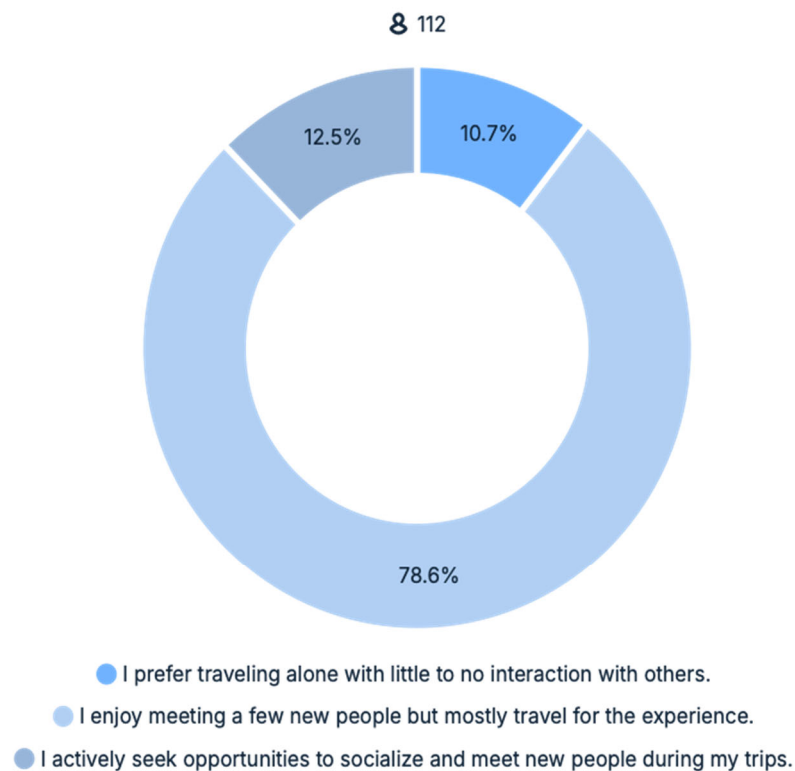


Figure 12. Value of meeting new people and socializing during your travels

4.2 Experiences in group tours and willingness to participate to crowdsourcing

Of the respondents 80% had participated in a group tour and, based on previous experience, the convenience of travel arrangements was the most significant benefit of a group tour. Other key factors were access to organized itineraries, a chance to explore new skills of experiences, and security and safety. Respondents over 65 years had all participated in a group tour and like the younger target group appreciated the convenience of the travel arrangement and the access to organized travel arrangements. In this group safety was valued by 60% while in the younger group only 46% mentioned it as an positive aspect.

Less important were self-explorations and only one replied that a group wasn't meeting expectations. The greatest negative group travel experience came from the mismatch of group dynamics. Other points were the lack of flexibility, high costs, and too many participants. In the open-ended answers e.g., matters like sharing a room with a non-fitting personality or the poor quality of single rooms despite supplements for single passengers.

Feeling safe during a group tour as a solo traveler was according to most particularly important or somewhat important. As 66% of the over 65-year respondents felt that the safety feeling is very important only 49% of the younger respondents highlighted the importance. Of all respondents 95% felt that the tour experience should either extremely or more or less fit their interests and there was no difference between the younger and older respondents.

When asked about their willingness to participate in planning a group tour with crowdsourcing 9% said they would be happy to participate and enjoy working together, 76% said they would participate with the condition that the planning is made easy and 15% said they would prefer to participate in a group trip that is pre-planned. The younger respondents were willing to participate in voting and prioritising and idea generation as to the +65 respondents' willingness to participate was evenly spread across all areas except the willingness give ongoing feedback during the tour.

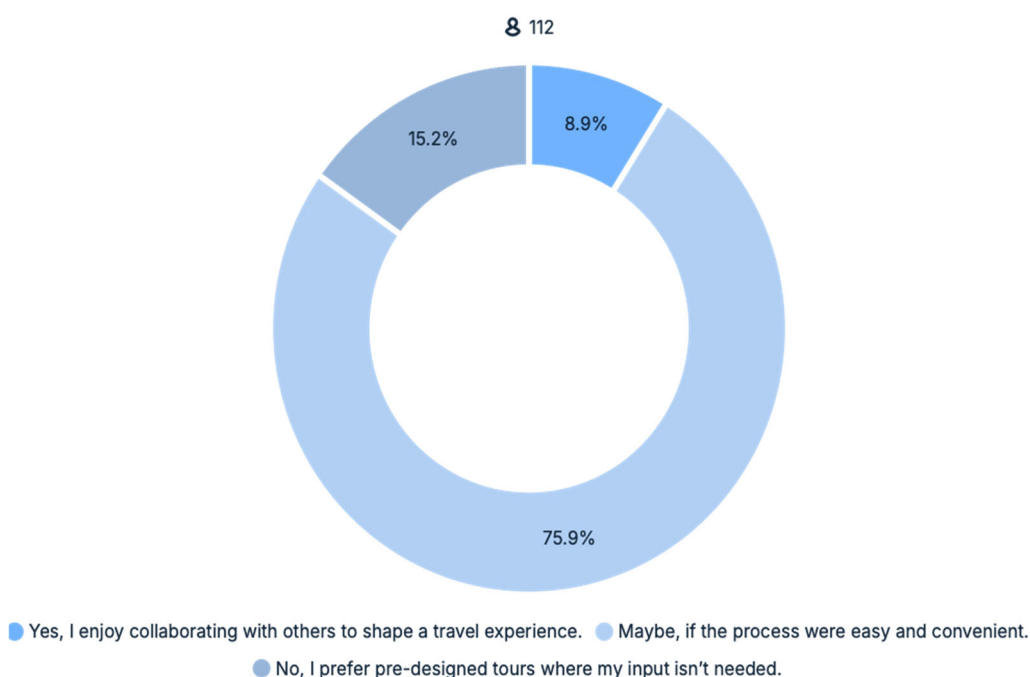


Figure 13. Willingness to participate in crowdsourcing ideas for group tours

To distinguish the question of willingness to participate to crowdsourcing in group tour planning the question respondents were asked to answer whether they are willing to join a tour that requires to participate in a process that involves gathering ideas, suggestions, and input from a large group of people to solve problems, develop products, or, design a group

travel experience and to contribute your ideas and preferences about destinations, activities, accommodations the 71% responded that they were either neutral or likely to join. Only 6% replied it to be very likely and 23% said it would be unlikely or very unlikely. There was no significant difference in between the respondents' age groups although the group that had not participated in a group tour were more neutral and none of the respondents replied it to be very likely or very unlikely that they would participate in a tour created with crowdsourcing.

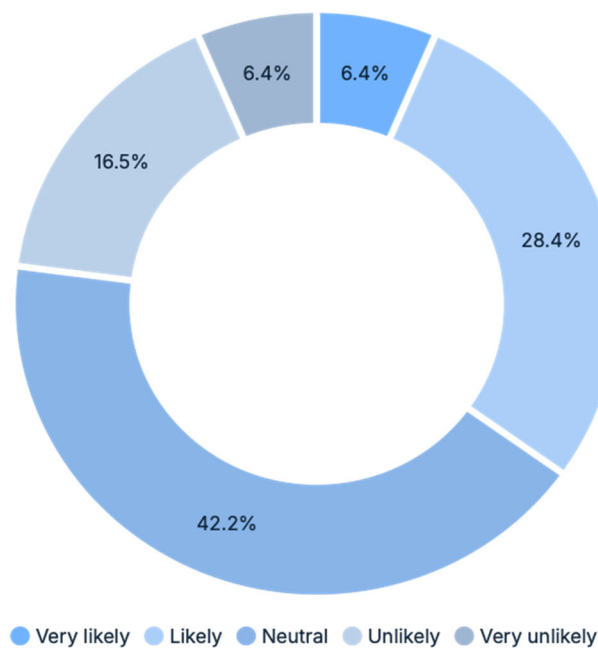


Figure 14. Likelihood of joining a tour planned with crowdsourcing

The main benefits of participation in a crowdsourced tour were the opportunity to meet travelers with similar interests and the benefit of cost sharing which was the most important for respondents in all age groups. The ability to suggest and vote about tour destinations and activities and the flexibility of the itinerary's schedule. For the younger respondent the cost sharing benefits were important for 59% as the +65 respondents felt only by 38% this to be an important factor. Not that important features are a collaboration with other travelers and transparency in decision making.

As the most important feature the respondents highlighted the freedom to choose activities, transparency in costs and possibility of personal time for exploring. Time for solo exploration was highlighted more important by the younger respondents by 57% while from the +65 respondents' group only 34% wanted time for solo exploration.

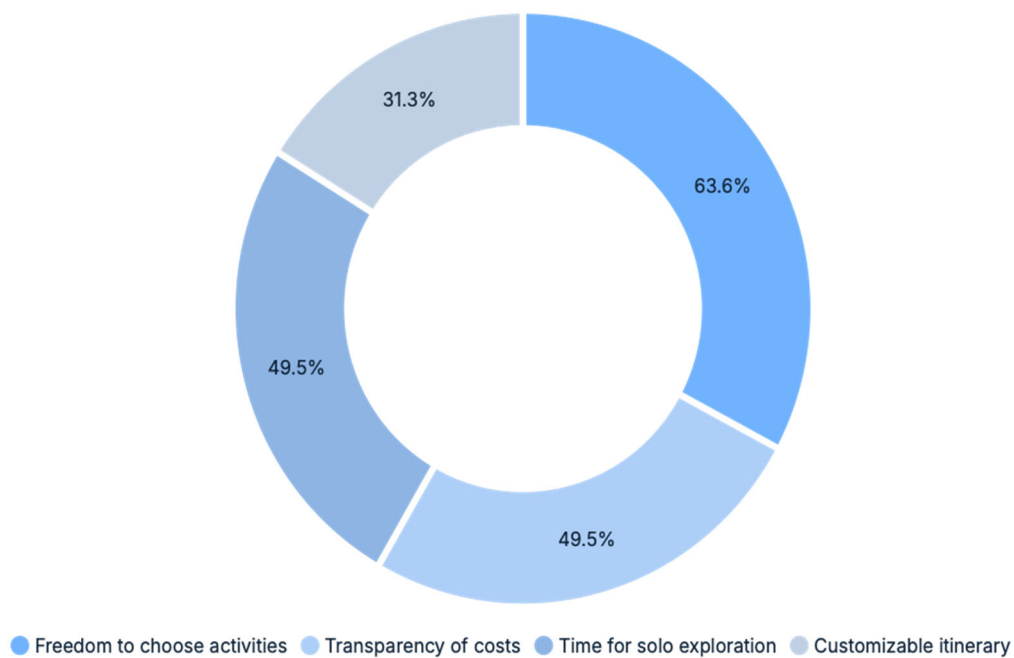


Figure 15. Most important features of a crowdsourced tour

The possibility to contribute to the planning of the tour by voting and suggestion destinations and activities was somewhat or neutrally important by 71%. The minority wanted to have full control about the final itinerary and the majority hoped for some control. The +65 group showed a significantly more neutral approach to the importance to contribution as 56% replied the importance to be neutral.

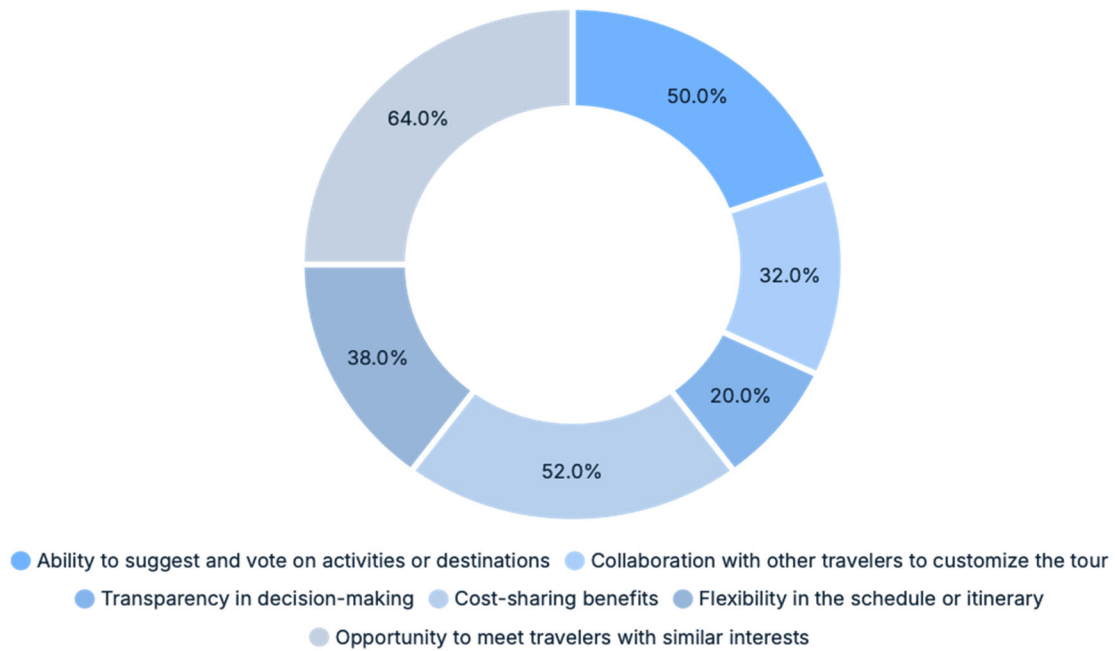


Figure 16. Motivation to participate in a crowdsourced tour

When asked about the preferred stage of participation the majority preferred to participate at the stage of idea generation by 48,6% and voting 50,5%. Prioritization and decision-making were considered important. Only 23% preferred a fully pre-planned itinerary. The motivation was slightly affected by the previous experience of group traveling as the ones that had traveled on a group tour previously highlighted the by opportunity to meet other travelers and the group that did not have previous experience highlighted the ability to suggest and vote about destinations and activities. Both groups were motivated by cost-sharing benefits as the second largest motivator.

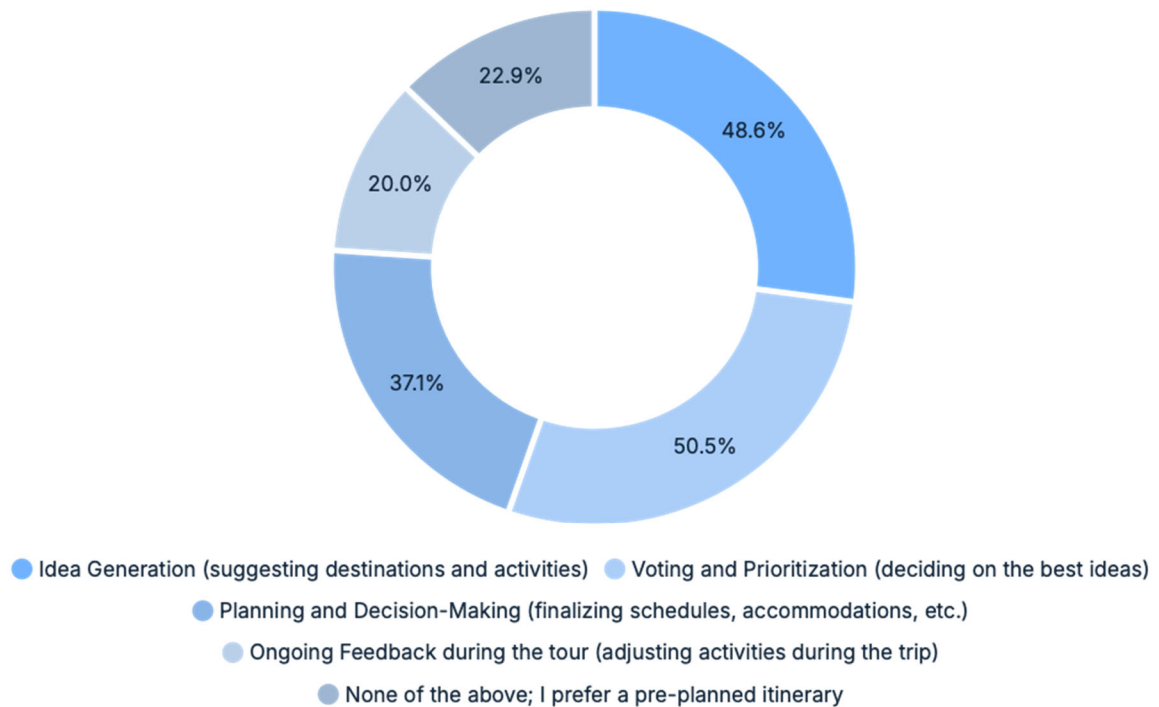


Figure 17. Preferred stage of participation

Tour planning and communication should preferably happen via a platform, messaging or mobile apps. Some preferred a meeting online or face-to-face. Mobile apps for instant collaboration were more preferred by younger respondents

An ongoing feedback mechanism during the tour to adjust the itinerary during the tour was not considered attractive by 61% but when asked about preference to be able to evolve the itinerary by voting during the tour the small majority preferred it to evolve and 41% preferred a fixed program. From the +65 respondents 75% didn't prefer a ongoing feedback mechanism.

When asked about the concerns about joining a crowdsourced group tour the main concern was the group dynamics. which was a concern of 68% of the +65 respondents and 64% of the younger respondents. Other concerns involved hidden costs, lack of control, the difficulty of traveler coordination and concerns about privacy.

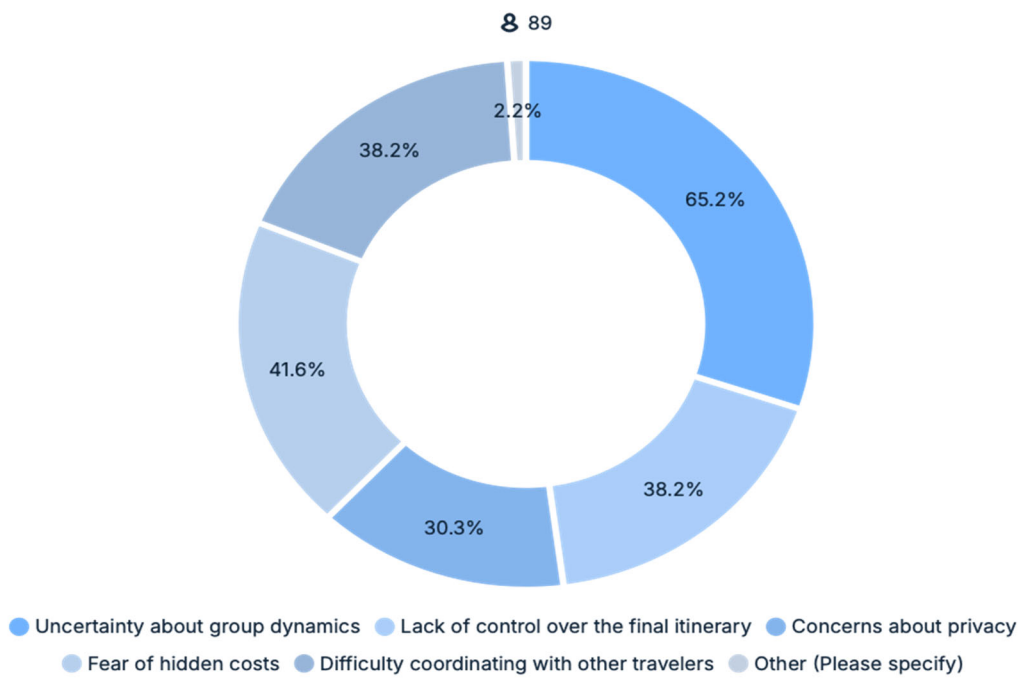


Figure 17. Concerns about joining a crowdsourced group tour

The open-ended answers highlighted the fear of losing control, personal time, space and spontaneity, quality of services, and equal contribution and final decision-making. A partly humorous comment by an experienced group traveler over 65 years was its “better to blame an outsider, the tour operator”.

5 Proposed development

The research aimed to find out if crowdsourcing is an applicable method for solo traveler group tour production and what are the most relevant motivational factors to the target group to participate in crowdsourcing and a crowdsourced group tour. To support the research the similarities and differences between service design, open innovation and crowdsourcing were clarified.

The research shows that crowdsourcing can be used to produce group tours for solo travelers and crowdsourcing as a method is an applicable tool for the development of SME businesses in group tour operating.

The growth in solo travel has been noticeable since the pandemic years and, according to the New York Times, by 2021 tour operators will have experienced a multiple increase in group travel by women aged 50 and over travelling alone. There are numerous international tour operators specialising in women-only solo travel (Kamin 2021). Though the international popularity there is none in the Finnish market. There is clear business potential in this target group which should be the potential of which should be exploited.

During the research work on differences and similarities of open innovation, service design and crowdsourcing, it was found that in addition to value creation for tours, crowdsourcing is a valuable tool in increasing innovation and problem-solving, giving access to expertise, enabling better engagement of customers and stakeholders and enhance cultural change in a company. Innovation and continuous improvement is a prerequisites for the long-term existence of a company. Crowdsourcing could also enable low-threshold innovation in small businesses. Especially family-owned SMEs would benefit from external perspectives and easily outsourced specialist skills-based task-sharing and innovation without bias in various business activities.

Open innovation, with crowdsourcing as one method, requires leadership and commitment from the company management. Dedicated support for creativity, the right dynamics, the capabilities of the participants and willingness to learn is essential.

The survey shows that 86% of respondents were attracted to participate in the development of a group tour product with crowdsourcing, while only 6% were very likely to participate in a tour developed with the method.

To attract people with real commercial added value to participate in the development of a group travel product, a reward mechanism is required. This reward should be increased for those members of the crowd participating in the tour without excluding non-participants from the project.

When determining the size of the reward, the crowding-out hypothesis must be homogenized and ensure that the level and amount of incentive are sufficient to induce expertise and commitment, but not too high to induce the crowding-out hypothesis. Participation should mainly be motivated by Intrinsic Motivation.

The biggest challenges are, in addition to reaching a motivated target group or community, managing the information flow, analyzing and managing the crowd. To have as result commercially viable production this is essential.

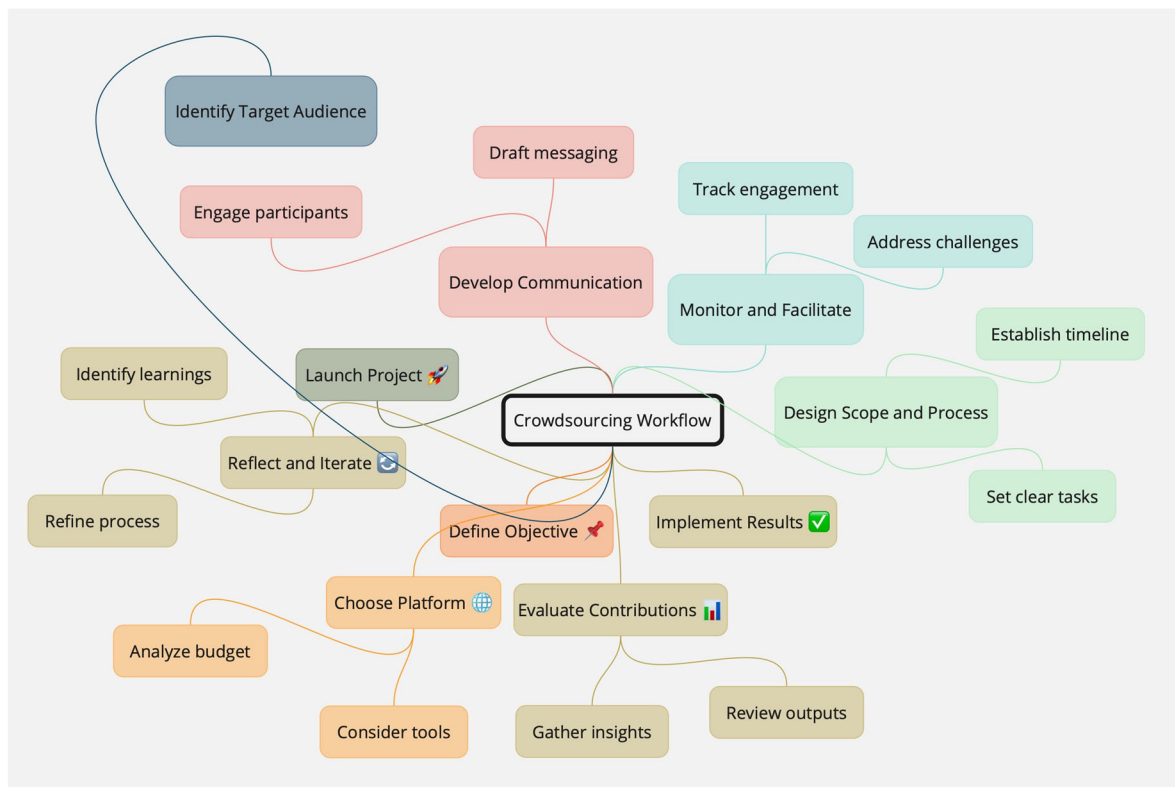


Figure 18. Crowdsourcing work and information flow

There are several ready-made online platforms to reach the audience for a crowdsourcing project. Building a platform and targeting an audience is possible and, with today's social

platforms, most likely reasonably cost-effective. Social media communities and instant messaging services already in use in the company could be good tools for a lightweight start-up model for crowdsourcing.

Research shows that poorly managed innovative work leads to a paradigm where the management of qualitative and quantitative knowledge plays a key role. A key question is whether the development of services based on open innovation, and in more detail crowdsourcing, is compatible with the resources available, and the ability of management to create the conditions of innovation and in more detail crowdsourcing (Torkkeli 2016, 123-124).

As the pursuit of financial success is often short-term in SMEs, it may also be useful to look at the idea generation phase if the Nominal Group Technique would bring more value to the process. The Nominal Group Technique is a product development method where product development is possible with fewer resources and creates inclusion (Gallager 1993). Nominal groups have been shown to create better quality ideas and instructed brainstorming processes enhance better productivity and have a better ability to select the best ideas for production. Even large, established organizations struggle to present radical and incremental innovations. The struggle to present something uncertain exists even though it is evident innovations are crucial for long-term of success. Many managers base their decisions on inductive reasoning that includes only the existing knowledge and doesn't exploit abductive reasoning and many opportunities remain unused (Torkkeli 2016).

6 Conclusions

6.1 Evaluation of Research Objectives and Findings

The study revealed that elements of crowdsourcing are already in use in Finnish SMEs, albeit unrecognized as such. Crowdsourcing is a method applicable at various levels, from addressing specific knowledge gaps to fostering innovation. Despite its potential, challenges such as strategic capacity, resource limitations, and cultural readiness within SMEs—especially family businesses—pose significant obstacles. The findings highlight the importance of having a robust internal culture of knowledge development and sharing as a precursor to leveraging crowdsourcing effectively.

The research confirmed the commercial viability of solo travelers as a target group for Finnish SMEs. While the survey indicated a willingness to participate in crowdsourcing initiatives, it also underscored the need for tailored approaches to engage this group. The lack of Finnish-specific tourism crowdsourcing platforms points to a significant market gap, emphasizing the importance of creating tools and environments that resonate with the local audience.

This study shows that solo travelers have individual preferences that need to be taken into account when planning trip production. Flexibility and individuality are the most important aspects to be considered. By addressing these perceptions, tour operators and industry stakeholders can create more inclusive and satisfying experiences for solo travelers of all ages. The study also highlights the potential of crowdsourcing as a tool for collaborative travel planning, provided it addresses key concerns such as group dynamics and their values of self-determination and shared interests. The study deepens our understanding of the behavior of solo travelers and offers useful recommendations for improving the travel experience of this growing market segment and for harnessing crowdsourcing to enhance the customer experience.

Effective crowdsourcing depends on careful task definition, adequate funding, and strategic guidance. SMEs must balance short-term financial priorities with long-term innovation goals to fully benefit from crowdsourcing.

6.2 Recommendations for Practical Implementation

Clearly outline strategic and operational requirements, ensuring the desired outcomes align with business goals. Crowdsourcing can address diverse needs.

- Launch small-scale initiatives using existing tools (e.g., social media groups or messaging platforms) to build familiarity with the method and demonstrate quick wins.
- Ensure adequate funding and skilled project management to guide the process and mitigate risks associated with insufficient resources or expertise.

The Kristina Travelers Facebook group and tour-specific WhatsApp groups facilitate customer engagement, knowledge sharing offering immediate value through community-building and customer insights. Expanding such initiatives could further enhance their impact. Involvement of people who have no existing customer experience of group travel or Kristina Cruises' products is essential to create a genuine basis for innovation and product development.

The goal is to embed crowdsourcing as a central driver of innovation and sustainability in tourism. By adapting to changing consumer preferences and fostering inclusive participation, the industry can create meaningful, responsible and inclusive travel experiences that benefit all stakeholders.

6.3 Evaluation of Study Reliability and Limitations

The study's findings are based on a survey and literature review, ensuring a strong foundation. However, the limited focus on reward mechanisms and the involvement of destination communities highlights areas for further exploration.

Future research could investigate the role of incentives in sustaining participant engagement and the potential scalability of existing crowdsourcing tools for group travel.

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