



## WHAT PARTICIPANTS REALLY WANT

---

**DESIGNING SUCCESSFUL  
CONFERENCES, CONVENTIONS  
AND EVENTS THAT MATTER**

[www.designing.events](http://www.designing.events)



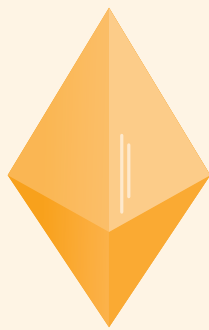
**LUKAS  
ZENK**



**THOMAS  
FUNDNEIDER**



**MARKUS  
PESCHL**



# Content

> INTRODUCTION .....	1
> HOW TO USE THIS BOOK .....	15
> CORE EVENT ACTIVITIES .....	27
> SOLUTIONS .....	47
> NEXT STEPS .....	63
> CONTACT .....	65



# 1. Introduction

## What this book can do for you?

We assume that if you are reading this book then you probably also know how to organize an event like a conference or convention. You are, no doubt, also familiar with the main ingredients for success: a distinguished keynote speaker, interesting and lively presentations, good food, vibrant networking breaks, and a relaxing, entertaining social program. However, in recent years, the number of events on offer has increased, while participants have less time and budget available to attend. As a consequence, they are becoming very careful when it comes to selecting those events that matter to them most.

But what do participants really want at such events? Many things, it would seem, and there is basically no “one-size-fits-all” design that meets all their different needs. Accordingly, it is left up to organizers to design events that really matter for their specific target groups. This hands-on book is designed to help you as an organizer to do just that.

Over the course of a three-year applied research project, we analyzed the needs of event participants. By event, we are referring here to professional, knowledge-intensive events like conferences, conventions, large-scale meetings or congresses where people generate and share

knowledge – and not, for example, to private or social functions like parties, weddings or music festivals, although some parts of the book could also be used in such cases. For the purposes of our research, we interviewed a large number of different stakeholders (participants, organizers, service providers, etc.), attended, observed, and organized various kinds of events, and tested new technology solutions. Prompted by a host of interesting – and at times even surprising – findings, we tried to make sense of them all, a process which ultimately resulted in a solid and tested approach to designing knowledge-intensive events. These results form the basis for this hands-on book.

The book is structured as follows:

### **Introduction**

In the introduction, we illustrate the idea behind this book by applying our design approach to two different existing events. We also present our graphical framework for designing events.

### **How to use this book**

This chapter explains the crucial steps to designing events that matter for your target audience.

### **Core event activities**

A detailed description of the core activities delegates participate in when they attend such events is provided in this chapter.

### **Solutions**

This chapter presents a catalog of concrete solutions for realizing your planned activities. These solutions are categorized based on three dimensions: architectural, social and technological.

### **Next steps**

Creating an integrated event design that matters for your target audience.

## **Introducing the world of events**

A huge number of events are now offered worldwide, and they come in many different shapes and sizes: conferences, conventions, and other formats all try to meet the expectations of their target audiences. Whilst they all differ in their detail and scope, on a deeper level they also contain specific core activities. In essence, it is these activities that sum up what participants really want.

To illustrate precisely what participants want from such professional events, we will begin with two specific ex-



amples and describe these well-known types of events using our own particular approach to event design. The design consists of 9 activities and 39 solutions that will be explained in detail in the following chapters.

## TED Talks

About 30 years ago, a new kind of event was launched, namely TED Talks. These are non-profit conferences that combine technology, entertainment, and design (TED). As a global event community, TED Talks use a special design with a clear mission: “How can we best spread great ideas?” Most presentations at such events last for 18 minutes and cover topics relating to some aspect of science, business, or the arts. Speakers are expected to give powerful and inspirational talks that will impress an inquisitive audience. To spread the ideas presented, many of these talks are recorded and made available online.

### Activities

Participants at such events expect passionate speakers who can present a challenging or future-oriented topic in a lively and entertaining manner. Accordingly, their main interest lies in obtaining information about new or great ideas. We refer to this activity from the delegate’s perspective as **INFORMING**. However, the participants at such events are also not interested in listening to boring lists of facts and figures; they want to be inspired by the speak-

ers and their ideas. We name this activity *INSPIRING*. Last, but by no means least, TED Talks participants expect to be entertained, so speakers are allowed to show amusing examples or even to crack jokes. We describe this activity as *ENJOYING*.

## Solutions

Based on these three core activities (*INFORMING*, *INSPIRING*, and *ENJOYING*), specific design solutions can be used to enable a TED event, as the following examples show.

Let's begin here with architectural solutions and take a look at the design of the physical space for TED Talks. Since speakers at these events do not interact frequently with the audience, all that is basically needed is a stage on which they can present their ideas. We refer to this solution in our approach as the *CLASSIC AUDITORIUM*.

So what about the social solutions used to design how participants interact? At this kind of event, speakers present to the whole audience – a bit like an actor on a stage. Accordingly, we refer to this as the solution *PRESENTATION*.

The design of the technological solutions at TED Talks is different to that used at many other events. TED Talks' participants also include millions of people who watch the talks online. To spread the ideas to this global audience, the organizers make use of advanced technologies and social media. Typically, a TED Talk is recorded and

uploaded to the internet. We refer to this technological solution as *BROADCASTING*.

In summary, the design of TED events can be described as follows: the events endeavor to meet the expectations of their participants by focusing on the core activities of *INFORMING*, *INSPIRING* and *ENJOYING*. They do so using the *CLASSIC AUDITORIUM* architectural solution, the *PRESENTATION* social solution and the *BROADCASTING* technological solution.

To provide us with a comparison, we will now take a look at a very different kind of event and again use our approach to examine participant expectations in this case.

## Networking Events

The participants at networking events, or “mixers”, have very different expectations to the participants at a TED Talk. Instead of seeking inspiration from great speakers, they are more interested in meeting other people in their field. Such events are typically short in duration and are often held after work in relaxing and comfortable surroundings. Finger food and drinks are usually provided, and there is ample space for people to come and go, without needing to keep to a formal agenda. Indeed, the setting is specifically designed to allow participants to do what the title suggests, namely to network.

## Activities

Whether the participants are searching for business contacts, looking to establish research collaborations, or simply want to talk to specific people, their main activity at these kinds of events is networking with other interesting individuals. In our approach, we call this activity *CONNECTING*. After connecting, participants often swap business cards for future reference or may even already arrange to work together during the event, an activity we refer to as *COLLABORATING*. Unlike other events, networking events rarely have a fixed agenda. Participants at these events seek and welcome the opportunity to interact with people outside their own organization and are free to walk around and talk to whoever they want. Accordingly, we label this activity *FREE-ROAMING*.

## Solutions

Specific solutions are required at networking events to enable these core activities (i.e. *CONNECTING*, *COLLABORATING*, and *FREE-ROAMING*).

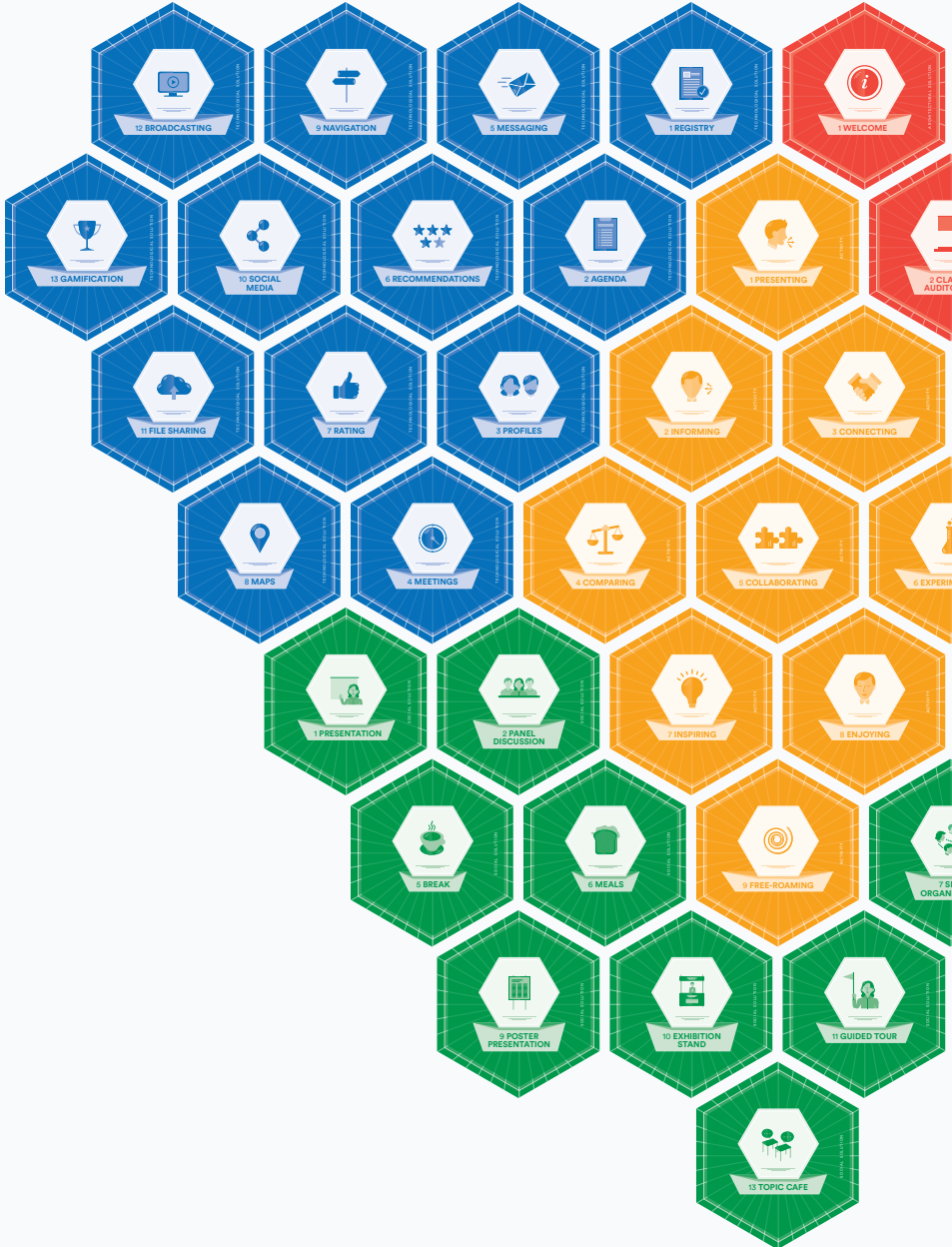
The architectural solutions should enable the participants to interact freely without following a formal agenda. The *ENCOUNTER AREA* solution offers space for chance encounters without a prior arranged meeting.

A variety of social solutions are deployed at such events, including, for example, some form of *ICEBREAKER* to help participants to get to know each other at the start.

As far as the technological solutions are concerned, *PROFILES* provides participants in this case with information about other attendees prior to the event and helps them to identify people with common interests.

This brief – and admittedly fairly selective – description of a networking event focuses on the core activities *CONNECTING*, *COLLABORATING*, and *FREE-ROAMING* described above. Based on these activities, the *ENCOUNTER AREA* architectural solution, *ICEBREAKER* social solution, and *PROFILES* technological solution could, for example, be combined to realize a successful event.

These two cases serve merely as an indication of how the design and approach we have developed (and which we describe in this book) can be put to good effect. However, the real value of this book will only become evident when you apply our approach to the actual activities and solutions encountered in your own event. Our intention with this book is to offer you a means of support in designing your event, based on what your participants really want and to inspire you to create meaningful events for your particular target group. In the chapters that follow, we will provide you with a “toolkit” to do just that.





## Graphical framework

In the previous chapter, we offered you an indication of how we would go about analyzing and designing two different events. This graphical illustration provides an overview of our event design framework, which, as indicated in the introduction, is made up of core activities (yellow) and architectural (red), social (green) and technological (blue) solutions.

You can use this framework to identify and select appropriate activities and solutions for your event. In our two examples, TED Talks and networking events, the event design would look as follows:



*Exemplary elements for a TED Talk*





*Exemplary elements for a networking event*

We will now guide you through this framework and show you how to apply it to your own knowledge-intensive event.



## 2. How to use this book

Depending on what your participants want, some activities will be more important for your event than others. The following three steps explain how to design and realize events that matter for your participants using our approach.

## 1. Identify your core activities

The core event activities are the basis for designing an event that meets the expectations of your participants. Based on our in-depth interviews and observations of various participants and events, we have identified and developed a set of nine core activities. These activities form the building blocks of all knowledge-intensive events.

Depending on the goals of your particular event, you will first need to identify the most important activities which support these goals. This step is crucial, since it establishes the foundation for all following steps. In most cases, an event will have around three core activities. The key point here is to focus on the crucial activities that best support your goals, and not to try to select them all. The nine core activities we identified are as follows:



## 1. Presenting

Introducing yourself, your knowledge, or your organization. A key feature of such events is knowledge transfer, which is primarily based on one-way communication.



## 2. Informing

Acquiring knowledge from a person and generating new knowledge. Understanding and creating meaning are two aspects that are central in this context.



## 3. Connecting

Gaining access to other people or organizations. The focus here is on networking, personal encounters, and establishing personal relationships.



## 4. Comparing

Revealing yourself or your ideas to a group of your peers with the aim of establishing a comparison, testing your ideas, or seeking validation.



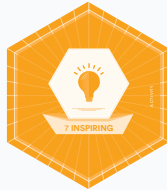
## 5. Collaborating

Creating some kind of output or product in a collaborative setting. The outcome can be manifold, e.g. a joint idea, vision, model, product, or service.



## 6. Experimenting

Prototyping your initial ideas. Participants present an incomplete idea to obtain feedback on and improve it.



## 7. Inspiring

Being inspired and gaining new insights in an unexpected manner. This activity aims at developing new perspectives and thinking out of the box.



## 8. Enjoying

Time for recreation. Freed from their daily routines, participants seek personal development, enjoy entertainment or take time out for sightseeing.



## 9. Free-roaming

A chance to roam around freely. The important aspect of this activity is the freedom of the mind and the space it offers for creative daydreaming.

Each of these nine core activities will be described in detail in the subsequent chapters using the following structure:

### **Description**

The purpose and goals of this particular activity.

### **Characteristics**

The characteristic qualities that are required for each activity. A tag cloud characterizes the atmosphere of the activity on an emotional level.

### **Implementation**

Pros and cons of the activity as well as links to the recommended solutions in the architectural, social, and technological dimensions.

### **Outcome**

The expected outcome of an activity. In most cases, this is a “knowledge service” that could act as input for another activity.



*Identify around three core activities*



## 2. Choose your solutions

After you have identified your core activities, you can move on to our recommended solutions. They should inspire you and provide you with a pool of appropriate (and tested) solutions to support you in realizing the defined goals of your event.

Every knowledge-intensive event takes place in a specific and concrete setting, which we refer to as a design solution. Our research revealed that every event is made up of architectural (red cards), social (green cards), and technological solutions (blue cards), hence our decision to group the solutions according to these dimensions:

- **Architectural design dimension**  
This covers the physical and architectural configurations that enable the core activities.
- **Social design dimension**  
The formats which facilitate specific social interactions between participants.
- **Technological design dimension**  
The key features of a software tool (e.g. apps) or physical materials (e.g. a conference booklet) which augment the goals of the core activities.

## Architectural

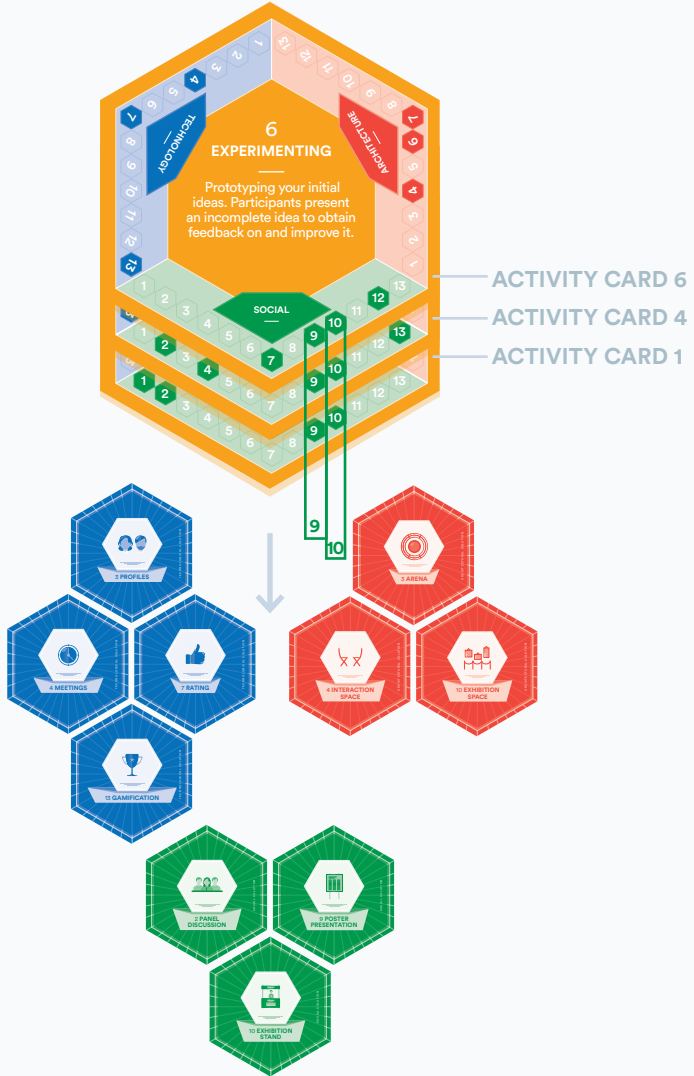
1. Welcome area & reception
2. Classic auditorium
3. Arena
4. Interaction space
5. Space of astonishment
6. Project space
7. Public working space
8. Matchmaking Space
9. Encounter area
10. Exhibition space
11. External space
12. Private office
13. Silent space

## Technological

1. Registry
2. Agenda
3. Profiles
4. Meetings
5. Messaging
6. Recommendations
7. Rating
8. Maps
9. Navigation
10. Social media
11. File sharing
12. Broadcasting
13. Gamification

## Social

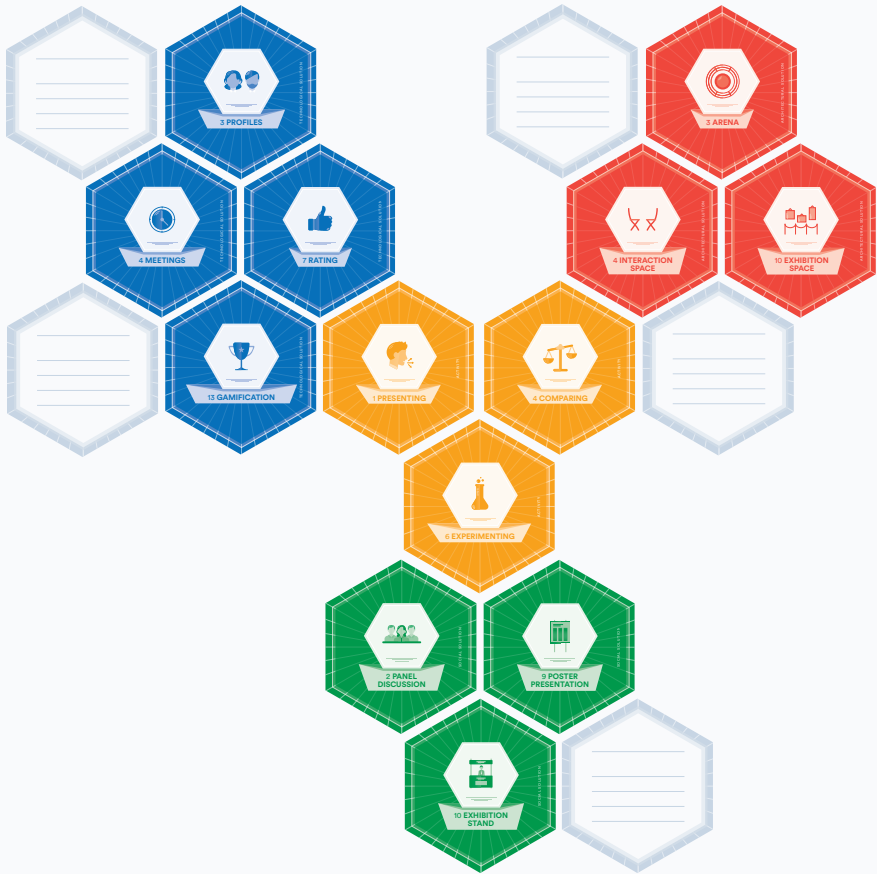
1. Presentation
2. Panel discussion
3. Icebreaker
4. Social matchmaking
5. Break
6. Meals
7. Self-organization
8. Social change
9. Poster presentation
10. Exhibition stand
11. Guided tour
12. Attraction
13. Topic cafe



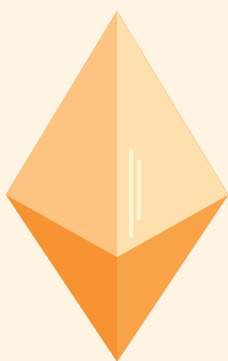
*Choose around three to five recommended solutions*

### 3. Compose an integrated event design

You can now lay out the identified core activities (from step 1) together with the chosen solutions (from step 2). Start to create a coherent event design by adjusting or sorting out cards, as well as creating and adding additional notes (grey cards). It is important to develop and adopt an overall view of these solutions, since empirical studies show that some solutions do not work well with others. The result is a visual design of all crucial ingredients for your event, which serves as a master template and blueprint for all following steps (e.g. to do list, responsibilities, time plan). This is an inductive process, and we can support you here with our experience and knowledge.



*Compose your own event design*



## 3. Core event activities

# 1. Presenting



## Description

One of the classic features of knowledge-intensive events is the transfer of knowledge, primarily new knowledge. This knowledge transfer is based on the assumption that one person holds certain knowledge which another person (or persons) want to acquire. The knowledge holder is willing to share his/her insights with the audience. However, in some cases, a person may not seek primarily to share his/her own knowledge, but instead wants to present himself/herself or his/her organization.

The most common format for such knowledge transfer in an event setting is the presentation (speeches, PowerPoint slides, etc.), which generally follows a standardized pattern of argumentation or narrative. In some cases, the speaker's goal may not only be to transfer knowledge, but also to convince the audience about himself/herself or about a specific topic.

## Characteristics





## Implementation

### Pros

The advantage of this format is that it generally follows clear rules and standardized patterns. Hence, the audience can focus on the content.

### Cons

It is essentially a non-discursive format, which allows only limited interaction and discussion between the audience and the speaker.

## Architectural Dimension



## Social Dimension



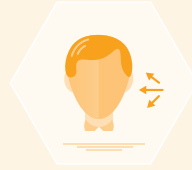
## Technological Dimension



## Outcomes

- Decrease the knowledge gap between speaker and audience
- Explicit and shared knowledge (shared understanding is uncertain)
- Open questions from participants

## 2. Informing



### Description

From the audience (event participant) perspective, the goal of this core activity is to gain information about a specific knowledge domain, a person, an organization, etc. Accordingly, sense-making and creating meaning play a central role here. They are aimed at establishing a state of certainty in the participants.

This activity is driven by the knowledge gap mentioned above, as well as by curiosity, interest, and lack of knowledge on the part of the audience. It is also driven by the participant's awareness and knowledge of their own lack of knowledge in the specified field.

### Characteristics

gaining understanding  
 new insights  
 questioning  
 curiosity  
 active participation  
 openness  
 being interested  
 change  
 opening up  
 absorbing knowledge  
 sense-making  
 certitude  
 orientation  
 creating meaning  
 confidence

## Implementation

### Pros

Knowledge about a specific domain or person is acquired and may result in a shared understanding between two or more persons.

### Cons

In many cases, this core activity can be a rather passive process in which a lack of interaction means that there is no guarantee that the knowledge transferred has actually also been understood.

### Architectural Dimension



### Social Dimension



### Technological Dimension



## Outcomes

- Standardized knowledge
- Shared knowledge
- Open questions
- (Potential) Satisfied audience

### 3. Connecting



#### Description

The focus of this core activity lies on the personal encounter and on establishing personal and social relationships. As the organizer of an event, you need to be aware that in this activity your participants leave the space of anonymity and step out in the space of real social and personal encounters. To do so, they have to transcend their own boundaries and, at least temporarily, enter someone else's space. This is a critical and fragile phase, as they can also face the risk of being turned down by the person(s) they want to approach. Hence, it requires special treatment and facilitation. This applies especially for people who find it difficult to approach other people (for whatever reason), and this is where you as an organizer come in. Alongside the establishing of new connections, this core activity also extend to the cultivating of existing social contacts and relationships.

#### Characteristics

social interaction  
 insecurity competitive personal  
 accessibility curiosity  
 finding others personal encounter  
 active  
 expectations  
 confidentiality hope  
 existential complementing  
 protection authentic

## Implementation

### Pros

Social cohesion is established in a not overly formal setting. This creates the social foundation for networking.

### Cons

Only socially active or open persons will be able to establish connections, unless some form of social or technological facilitation is used or provided by the organizers.

## Architectural Dimension



## Social Dimension



## Technological Dimension



## Outcomes

- Personal encounters and relationships
- Social networks
- Communities and Friendships

## 4. Comparing



### Description

Aside from providing participants with an appropriate forum for meeting new people and gaining new insights, knowledge-intensive events also include a “comparing and searching for confirmation and verification” aspect.

In essence, these events are places where participants who are interested in a specific field gather. They thus also serve participants as an ideal setting for benchmarking, i.e. can be used to test, compare and verify ideas or new approaches in a peer setting. The goal of such comparing activities is not necessarily to work with peers to develop new insights (see also the section on “Experimenting” as a core activity), but to test (and if necessary defend) your own ideas and perspective. For your participants, the primary goal here is to compare themselves or their ideas to those of their peer group. As a result, this comparing activity might well lead to the establishment of individual “camps” with their own leaders and followers.

### Characteristics



## Implementation

### Pros

Makes knowledge and products comparable; enables benchmarking with similar or competing concepts.

### Cons

It is hard to present radically new knowledge or establish a trustful atmosphere.

## Architectural Dimension



## Social Dimension



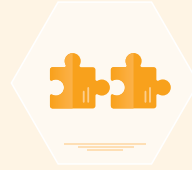
## Technological Dimension



## Outcomes

- Explicit differences
- Social rankings
- Paradigms and schools of thoughts
- Development of camps

## 5. Collaborating



### Description

The goal of this core activity is to create some kind of output or “product” in a collaborative setting. This joint outcome or product can be manifold: a joint idea, vision, model, product or service, etc. What your participants are seeking here is the opportunity to develop something in a process of collaboration that they could not have developed on their own, i.e. as an individual. This activity is driven by the expectation that synergies can be used to improve the outcome. Establishing these synergies, allowing them to come to fruition and working in such a social situation requires social coherence, an atmosphere of trust, and joint understanding.

### Characteristics

openness  
 active  
 dialogues  
 sharing  
 cooperating  
 social coherence  
 sketching  
 supporting  
 negotiating  
 listening  
 trust  
 goal centered  
 collaborating  
 convergence  
 semi-protected  
 structuring  
 creating



## Implementation

### Pros

Participants leave the event with a concrete product or result in their hands.

### Cons

It might prove difficult to find enough time for collaboration and creation during an event with a full program

## Architectural Dimension



## Social Dimension



## Technological Dimension



## Outcomes

- Shared product
- Shared understanding
- A group with a shared vision or understanding

## 6. Experimenting

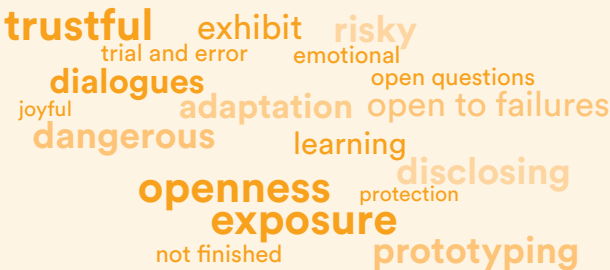


### Description

The basic idea behind this activity can be compared to a prototyping approach. By presenting not completely finished and polished results, participants seek to obtain feedback from their peers in order to learn and improve it. As this is a collective activity, such an approach can be very fruitful, because it incorporates new perspectives and reveals strengths and weaknesses. It is almost like a kind of “public experiment” in a protected environment. Naturally, such an approach requires openness and willingness to share knowledge and expertise.

From a participant’s perspective, this core activity is directed towards opening yourself up to the opinion of your peers – but without the need to defend yourself: the goal here is to learn from the feedback provided by the others.

### Characteristics



## Implementation

### Pros

New ideas can be tested and exposed to peers in a “friendly” and protected environment.

### Cons

A high level of openness for “unfinished” concepts/prototypes is required from participants.

## Architectural Dimension



## Social Dimension



## Technological Dimension



## Outcomes

- Improved prototypes
- Joint understanding
- New colleagues and possibilities for cooperation

## 7. Inspiring



### Description

This core activity is about becoming inspired and gaining new insights in an unexpected manner. This activity supports the kind of processes in which new ideas seem to simply emerge out of nothing. Aside from inspiring presentations or conversations, a knowledge-intensive event also serves as a place and time where participants can become inspired and develop new perspectives (individually or collectively). Accordingly, the event as a place has to offer participants possibilities to question and move away from their established patterns of perceptions and thinking.

This activity is not goal-oriented. Instead, it focuses on unexpected encounters with the new and thus on opening up new spaces of knowledge and behaviors. This can be achieved by various means and intervention methods, such as irritations, fostering curiosity, silent and inspiring elements, or a meditative or natural environment.

### Characteristics



## Implementation

### Pros

Allows participants to be surprised and to reflect on their emotional and intellectual experience.

### Cons

It is difficult to achieve such an atmosphere and state of mind, since it is dependent not only on the enabling environment, but also on the openness and attitude of the participants (which cannot be fully controlled).

### Architectural Dimension



### Social Dimension



### Technological Dimension



### Outcomes

- New insights and energy to start new ideas and projects
- Encounters with the new
- New perspectives and new patterns of perception and behavior

## 8. Enjoying



### Description

Many participants use their time at a conference or knowledge-intensive event not only for the purposes of gaining new knowledge or connecting with people but also for recreation and entertainment. They see it as quality time which they can use for their enjoyment and personal development, e.g. doing things like sightseeing, leisure activities, reading, (re-)opening their minds to new ideas, etc. It is a time-out from their daily routines and a chance to get out of the office and away from their e-mail inboxes for a while.

The goal of this activity is to provide an environment that allows such an atmosphere and feeling of well-being and lightheartedness. In many cases, the almost vacation-like atmosphere and attitude of the participants supports this activity. Participants will be even more satisfied with an event if they return home not only with new insights and new social connections but also relaxed and ready to embrace their work with added or renewed motivation.

freedom holiday  
openness  
entertainment  
lightheartedness  
illusion  
being away  
distraction  
humorous  
playful  
non-goal oriented  
inspirational  
unobserved  
well-being  
enjoyable

## Characteristics Implementation



### Pros

Providing a user experience that satisfies not only the desire to learn something new but also to relax and be entertained.



### Cons

It is difficult to find a good balance between creating a serious working atmosphere and providing appropriate time and space for relaxation.

## Architectural Dimension



## Outcomes

- Relaxation and leisure activities
- Well-being and lightheartedness
- New inspirations and renewed motivation for everyday work

## 9. Free-roaming



### Description

This core activity is all about having the opportunity to roam around freely. An important aspect here is the “freedom in the mind and space” for creative daydreaming. Aside from the work and recreational aspects of a conference, many participants use their participation at such knowledge-intensive events as personal creative time. They draw inspiration from the new and unfamiliar environment.

In this sense, they treat it as a kind of “free space”, where they are free from the routine of daily business and their everyday lives. They use this space and time to immerse themselves in a world of new ideas and silence.

This core activity is different from the “Enjoying” activity (see above), which focuses on leisure, relaxation and entertainment. Free-roaming focuses instead on inspiration and on creating new ideas in an unrestricted and free environment. The important aspect here is freedom in the mind, in space, and in attitude. This provides the basis for creativity and inspiration.

### Characteristics

freedom    silence    individual  
 openness    retreat    open mind  
 solitude    undetermined    peacefulness    enjoyable  
 inspiration    non-goal oriented  
 playfulness    relaxed    high quality time  
 regenerating    individual    welcoming



## Implementation

### Pros

A relaxed atmosphere that frees participants from their daily schedules and routines. It provides the basis for new ideas and thoughts.

### Cons

Participants who are expecting a working environment might be frustrated if they are not confronted with new explicit knowledge and tasks.

### Architectural Dimension



### Social Dimension



### Technological Dimension



## Outcomes

- New inspiration and ideas
- Relaxed and open mind
- Inner peace and satisfaction



# 4. Solutions

# Architectural design solutions

In this chapter, we describe in more detail the architectural design dimensions already outlined above. These physical settings constitute the most important architectural parameters of such knowledge-intensive events. They serve to give the core activities a physical shape and form.



## 01 Welcome area & reception

When a participant arrives at an event, this space is the first point of contact. Its main function is to welcome all participants, group them together and “assign” them according to their needs or aims. A central – or otherwise obvious – location serves this purpose well.



## 02 Classic auditorium

This is a spatial configuration in which a speaker presents something to an audience. The speaker should be visible to all participants, and the seating is typically arranged in rows.



### 03 Arena

In an arena setting, there are two main areas: (1) an inner circle, in which one or more persons discuss a topic, (2) a wider circle around the edge with the spectators, who primarily watch and listen. Since this spatial configuration needs an audience, it is useful to be central with good accessibility.

### 04 Interaction space

This space enables the staging of highly interactive formats. Unlike the auditorium, the speaker and audience interact constantly here (dialogue, group exercises, presentations, etc.). The main focus of work in this space is talking and thinking. All furnishings and equipment must be readily (re-)movable. Dividing walls are useful for separating different groups.



### 05 Space of astonishment

This space is intended to be inspiring. It should positively irritate its audience, in the sense that they are profoundly surprised. The aim with this space is to launch the following process loop: being surprised, posing questions, reflecting, gaining new insights. The design of this space can be very different and should fit with the main purpose of the event.



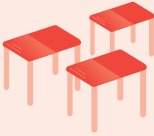
## 06 Project space

This is an enclosed space for small groups of people working together on a specific project. Since the focus here is on “doing”, the environment should support a workshop or “garage” setting. Any necessary materials or equipment should be available and a moderator might also be conducive to the work in this space.



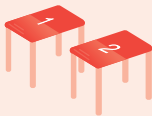
## 07 Public working space

This is a centrally located space that offers niches, alcoves, or similar workplaces where people can withdraw to work – either alone or in small groups. It allows them to work in private on certain tasks, yet at the same time remain visually connected with (but not distracted by) what is going on at the event.



## 08 Matchmaking space

A dedicated, designated space for connecting people. It consists of a clear meeting point, a space for short, private talks, and additionally a moderated process to get in touch with each other. The space should be located away from the main proceedings, since it should provide people with a place where they can talk in private. Any meetings held in this space will usually have been arranged beforehand (no ad-hoc meetings).



## 09 Encounter area

This area offers space for chance encounters, i.e. for coming into contact with people without a prior arranged meeting. It is best enabled by a strong attraction (e.g. a new car for an event in the automobile industry), which brings people together naturally. Its location should be central, and its design should be spacious, with both crowded and individual zones. It should convey a sense of being a casual and “non-committal” area.



## 10 Exhibition space

This is an open space that should be located centrally, i.e. it should be easily accessible and near a main internal circulation route. Its main function is to exhibit and display posters, physical objects, prototypes, tools, etc. (with or without the use of digital technologies).



## 11 External space

This is a place outside the event venue that potentially enables people to generate new perspectives (“out of the box”). The place could be used for entertainment or as a possibility of retreat. In any case, it should have a “playfulness” quality.





### 12 Private office

This space serves as a classic “third space” and provides a working environment away from the office where people can withdraw to work in private. It requires visual and acoustic privacy (closed room), should be on the outskirts of the event space, and needs a proper management system for room bookings.



### 13 Silent space

The “silent space” offers people a place to retreat and think about things in silence. As such, it should be both soundproof and afford visual protection. It provides participants with a private space in which they can concentrate on personal issues, address their work-life balance or renew their mind. The setting is usually very basic and designed to accommodate its more reflective usage (e.g. meditating, yoga, etc.).



# Social Design Solutions

In this chapter, we describe the various social formats and methods that are available to event organizers. They are grouped and generalized from various specific social formats. Since each solution can be adapted in many ways, we have restricted our descriptions here to their main features and functions.

## 01 Presentation



The classic presentation format consists of a speaker and an audience. Presentations may be followed by an optional round of questions or statements from the audience. They are often moderated, e.g. by a chairman who is in charge of timekeeping and coordinates the Q&A session. There are several different types of presentations, including keynotes (an in-depth speech specifically addressing the theme of the conference), “Pecha Kuchas” (20 slides, each presented in 20 seconds), etc.

## 02 Panel discussion

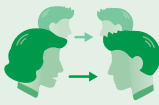


In a panel discussion, two or more speakers take to the stage to discuss a particular topic in front of an audience, whose members are often invited to ask questions. A special variant of the panel discussion is the “fishbowl” conversation, which allow the entire group to participate in the debate or raise questions.



### 03 Icebreaker

This is a social format designed to help participants to get to know each other without having to have a deeper conversation. One specific example here is “business speed dating”, a moderated event at which it is socially acceptable for participants to approach each other more or less at random and then move on to someone else after only a short period of time.



### 04 Social matchmaking

This solution encourages planned networking among participants who do not yet know each other. Participants are given access to customized event software, which allows them to schedule meetings with or receive recommendations for other participants with similar interests to their own.



### 05 Break

Breaks (e.g. coffee breaks or post-conference drinks) provide a situation in which participants can interact freely without a speaker, moderator, or schedule. Drinks and snacks are typically provided, while seating is kept to a minimum to encourage participants to walk around and network.



## 06 Meals

Once they have been seated for lunch or dinner, people rarely change their seats. Accordingly, such meals provide a group of people with an opportunity to interact for a longer period of time than, for example, a coffee break. Lunches are usually more time-constrained than evening events, e.g. a (gala) dinner that can often include speeches and/or entertainment.



## 07 Self-organization

Participants work together autonomously on topics they have chosen themselves and which relate to a predefined subject. Possible work formats here could include the “open space” or “bar camp” approaches, where a moderator explains the general set-up, but participants choose their own topics, set their own schedules, and arrange their own meeting spaces or rooms. This type of activity benefits from pro-active participation.



## 08 Social change

This solution is generally aimed at developing a vision or strategy for a large group or organization (e.g. future conference or real time strategic change). Participants follow a specific procedure that is guided by a moderator. More active options here involve them in game-based approaches, e.g. simulation games or business theaters, in which they are helped to change or develop new behavior.

## 09 Poster presentation



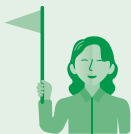
In the poster presentation, the presenter stands for around an hour in front of a poster that shows his/her project. Participants can either read and simply take note of the content or take the opportunity to put questions to the presenter. This is a more interactive format than a formal presentation with a smaller group of people interacting with the speaker.

## 10 Exhibition stand



Representatives of the exhibiting organization (e.g. a company or project group) are available on the stand to provide information about their services, products, or research. Participants seeking this information can come to the stand and talk directly to them. To attract more visitors to a stand, exhibitors often provide drinks, snacks, giveaways, or interactive games.

## 11 Guided tour

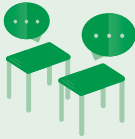


A guide takes a small group of participants on a tour, e.g. of specific exhibits or the event venue. Such tours provide participants with an opportunity to think about something other than the specific topic of the conference and can thus be relaxing, inspiring occasions which encourage conversation.



## 12 Attractions

Attractions are objects (e.g. prototypes, technologies etc.) that intrigue the professional audience. Participants can actively explore and try out their features. Similar to the guided tour option (see above), another object becomes the focus of attention and provides participants with something to talk about and the opportunity to identify others with similar interests to their own.



## 13 Topic cafe

A moderated process that brings together a group of participants to talk about a pre-defined topic. Some formats focus on mixing different people to discuss several topics for a short time (e.g. the World Cafe), while others place their emphasis on a longer, in-depth discussion with one stable group (e.g. Dialog Cafe).

# Technological Design Solutions

In this chapter, we describe the technological solutions and features we identified in the course of our research, providing, in each case, a general description of the features or functions of the actual software (e.g. apps) or physical material (e.g. conference booklet). Some solutions can be realized in both digital and analog format.



## 01 Registry

A registry can include an online registration tool in which participants can state their preferences (e.g. for meals and activities), provide their personal details, and facilitate payment before the event starts. A check-in tool supports organizers and provides them with information on who has already arrived or registered, or who is entitled to enter a specific room or attend a particular workshop.



## 02 Agenda

An agenda consists of a schedule or list of talks, and often includes copies of abstracts. Electronic agendas can provide a personalized schedule with a push notification service for news or recommendations for specific talks.



### 03 Profiles

Similar to an agenda, profiles can be provided in a printed booklet or in digital form. In the former, a list of participants, speakers, and exhibitors provides an overview of the people and organizations attending the event. The inclusion of additional details and search functionality in digital apps simplifies the process of finding relevant contacts.



### 04 Meetings

A meeting tool allows participants to arrange meetings with each other during the event or prior to the event. It also allows them to book rooms for such meetings.



### 05 Messaging

Messaging systems allow participants to communicate directly with each other before, during, and after an event. Some of these systems also include features that make it possible to also chat with all participants and display comments publicly (e.g. a Twitter wall).



### 06 Recommendations

Knowledge-intensive events typically combine a wide range of different people, talks, and topics. Recommendations algorithms based on tags and ratings help participants to determine which contacts, workshops, or presentations they might find of interest.



### 07 Rating

This feature enables participants to provide feedback and rate different topics. During a presentation, they can interact with a speaker in real-time (e.g. by participating in polls). They can also rate the quality of an individual session or the event as a whole.



### 08 Maps

The physical event space can be mapped in digital or analog format. Such maps can include directions on how to get to the event, copies of floor plans, locations of points of interest in the vicinity, or even tourist maps.



### 09 Navigation

In the physical space, signs indicate the way to the various rooms and venues. In a virtual space, different technologies provide participants with a means of navigating through the event to find rooms or other participants.



### 10 Social media

This feature allows participants to share their experiences with people inside and outside the conference through social media. They can login with their social network accounts, connect with other participants, and share their experiences by posting different media to their social platforms.





### 11 File sharing

All kinds of files are typically used at conferences and events: schedules, presentations, pictures, videos, etc. These materials can be printed out or made available online, but are typically only accessible to participants, and are not intended for public use.



### 12 Broadcasting

Most events are typically organized at a specific location with participants physically attending in person. Broadcasting technology allows other people to attend or benefit such an event via live streaming, video recording, podcasts, or virtual reality.



### 13 Gamification

In essence, gamification means using game elements and techniques in non-game contexts. In an event context, game-like activities can be included to encourage participant interaction, e.g. treasure hunts, quizzes on pertinent topics, or reward-based games (e.g. rate ten presentations and get a book for free).



## 5. Next steps

After you have selected your core activities and chosen the appropriate solutions, you can now put together an integrated event design that matters for your participants. Don't try to incorporate all possible activities and solutions. Focus instead on those specific options that are in line with the core aims of your event. By playing around with different possible designs, you will be able to determine what your participants want on a deeper level and identify the best solutions to support your event.

Once you have done this, you will be ready to start realizing your knowledge-intensive event based on the integrated event design that really matters to your participants. If you follow this approach, you will find that you are able to implement your event more quickly, since the basis for deciding the many issues involved is now clear.



## 6. Contact



## Lukas Zenk

is senior researcher at Danube University Krems, Department for Knowledge and Communication Management, and was the head of the project „Event Network Advancement“. He leads applied research projects in the fields of innovation research and social network analysis. In his studies he analyzes how people in organizations and events interact, and how collaborative innovations emerge. As a management trainer and keynote speaker, he bridges the gap between science and business applications. He was awarded several times for his innovative projects, lectures and talks.

**Contact:** [lukas.zenk@donau-uni.ac.at](mailto:lukas.zenk@donau-uni.ac.at)



## Thomas Fundneider

is founder and Managing Director of theLivingCore and specializes in strategy, innovation and transformation. Trained as a landscape architect and holder of an MBA in innovation, he focuses on the crucial details that often make the difference for the whole. Thomas can draw on a wealth of experience as manager of a number of major projects. His introduction of innovative, entrepreneurial working and thinking to organizations has made a lasting impact on his clients. He is a board member of PDMA Austria & lectures at several European universities.

**Contact:** [fundneider@thelivingcore.com](mailto:fundneider@thelivingcore.com)



## Markus Peschl

is Professor of Cognitive Science and Philosophy of Science at the University of Vienna. His research is driven by the question as to how the new comes into the world, and focuses on the interdisciplinary areas of innovation, knowledge, cognition and the design of so-called “Enabling Spaces,” i.e. spaces for the generation of new knowledge. He is a founder of theLivingCore, where he serves as chief scientific officer; in this capacity, he brings leading-edge research directly to his clients and has many years of international experience in consulting projects. Markus has published more than 120 articles and six books.

**Contact:** [franz-markus.peschl@univie.ac.at](mailto:franz-markus.peschl@univie.ac.at)



Please contact us if we can support you in designing an event that matters:

[www.designing.events](http://www.designing.events)  
[office@designing.events](mailto:office@designing.events)

## Credits

### Authors and copyrights

Lukas Zenk, Thomas Fundneider, Markus Peschl

### Art director

Klemen Trupej

### Design support

Agnes Böhm



universität  
wien

## Acknowledgements

This book came into being with the support of our colleagues during the FFG funded research project „Event Network Advancement“, especially Michael Smuc and Florian Windhager, as well as the interview partners, event organizers, designers, and participants we talked to and/or observed in the course of our research – some of whom perhaps did not even know they were providing such support. Thank you all for your help!



