

## Thinking Space Paper No.11

# A bar camp – an event format for community building and progressing a subject

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**Tired of events with endless PowerPoint presentations and little to no interaction? Tired of passive audiences that consume one presentation after another with no impact? Then try a Bar camp. The Bar camp is a conference format in which participants set up their own agenda with the help of a moderator at the beginning of the day around a central theme. This results in different sessions with different topics. The focus is on sharing knowledge and benefiting from the expertise of others, networking and getting to know new points of view. At the end, the results of sessions are presented in the plenary and a conclusion is drawn and prospects are given.**

A bar camp is a communication-intensive form of conference, the content and procedure of which are developed by the participants themselves and designed during the workshop. Bar camps are used for content-related exchange and discussion, but can also show concrete results at the end of the event. A bar camp is a form of large group moderation. It consists of lectures and discussions (so-called sessions), which are developed together on whiteboards, meta plans or pin boards at the beginning of the bar camp. Participants become “co-owners” of the event.

- The principle of the bar camp is “give and take”. Each participating person is requested to bring a 'gift' to the event in the form of a contribution (presentation, lecture, example).
- Everyone is invited to contribute concerns, experiences, competencies and burning questions within the framework of the event.

The participants advertise their own topics in the plenum and create a working group for each. In these working groups (sessions), possible projects are worked out or simply knowledge and experiences are exchanged. The results are collected at the end. In a short time, a wide variety of concrete measures can be developed and knowledge can be disseminated.

Ideally a bar camp has 50-80 participants including a wide range of actors as well as participants from concerned groups.

Within the day a maximum of 15 sessions are proposed by the participants. To be on the safe side the organizer might discuss potential propositions for session with a few participants that can function as an “ice breaker” proposing the first sessions. The themes are collected on a prepared white board, with 3 groups of 5 parallel sessions. The moderator tests interest for a proposed theme with the audience. Once all themes for sessions are collected, the moderator might merge similar themes with the consent of the proposers (no problem if there a couple of sessions less).

A 45-minutes session starts with a relaxed, max. 10 minutes oral impulse without PowerPoint of the proposer(s)/theme givers. Based on this initial input, the group discusses the content and contributes its

own experiences. A session assistant documents the key points of the proposer, the following discussion and the resulting message on a prepared, structured flipchart (see example below).

In this way, a short version of the session is available for the Gallery Walk in the late afternoon. The initiator orally summarizes the results for the participants in 1.5 minutes. The moderator, celebrates the successful outcome together with the participants in the final plenum. The collection and distribution of the results also requires a good structure. An essential element is the social and professional networking of the participants, even beyond the bar camp. The success of the event ultimately depends on the ability of the organizers to support and accompany the project group in implementing their ideas after the bar camp.

The image shows a flipchart template with five horizontal sections, each with a rounded top and bottom. The sections are labeled as follows:

- Session Title
- Idea giver/sponsor
- Key ideas of the proposer
- Discussion
- Results/recommendations/project

We tested the Bar camp model in March 2020 at the example of Integration of people with a refugee and migration background into our working world: opportunities - successes - challenges - new ways?<sup>1</sup> We paid particular attention to the heterogeneity of the participating group and invited not only public authorities, labour market agencies, migrant support organisations, NGOs and researchers but also migrants, refugees and volunteers to not only talk about the issue but discuss it with the concerned group. A lot of effort therefore went into actively finding and inviting of interested parties, the use of social media and the encouragement of multipliers to spread the invitation further. The invitation encouraged active participation and invited already suggestions for session-topics.

The participants valued the bar camp a great success. In addition to the essential element of the social and professional networking of the participants, it was possible in a short time to discuss a variety of concrete measures, to discuss questions in a short way and to exchange knowledge and experiences. Not only were all perspectives listened to here, rather there was a goal-oriented, question-clarifying exchange at eye level. The focus was on people and major strategic problems were discussed in a solution and practice-oriented manner. The feedback that such an event should take place significantly more frequently at regular intervals speaks for itself and the findings are taken into practice and reverberate individually and structurally. Integration as a flexible, living construct that is constantly evolving can only be made possible through the contribution of people. The Bar camp created the space and the knowledge that existing potential should be used and supplemented by additions, and that shared experiences, an understanding of diversity and openness will enable integration in the labor market.

We can only encourage everyone to use this participatory event format to support a community building or progress a relevant subject. To this end, we share with you the five most important ingredients for us to put together a great bar camp.

- Participants: come from a heterogeneous environment, number of participants between 50-80 people
- Moderator: gives the bar camp a coherent framework: is well prepared, leads and closes the bar camp

<sup>1</sup> A write up of the Bar camp "Integration of people with a refugee and migration background into our working world: opportunities - successes - challenges - new ways?" on 12 March 2020 can be found [https://www.kiz.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Barcamp\\_Paper\\_EN\\_042020.pdf](https://www.kiz.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Barcamp_Paper_EN_042020.pdf)

- Give and take: Each participant is open to exchange, brings something (e.g. an experience, a suggestion, a concern)
- Sessions: Will be put together by the participants and put together on flip charts and pin boards and later presented in the plenum
- Goal: The participants use their expertise to enter into an exciting exchange, learn from each other and ultimately work on a common goal.