

Chapter 11

Web 2.0 Meets Conference: The EduCamp as a New Format of Participation and Exchange in the World of Education

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ABSTRACT

Admittedly the usual conference format stays in opposite to the thoughts of participation and equality in Web 2.0. The EduCamp is a special BarCamp for trends in teaching and learning. It is focused on the educational context and considers important topics like E-Learning 2.0 in schools, universities or business and many others. The main intention of an EduCamp will become obvious which aims on conversations and discussions about different problem areas, searching and finding solutions together and exchanging on application scenarios or appropriate tools for education. It is based on a new concept that finally offers potentials for developing a conference culture with improved participation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The ideas of using social software in educational context, also known as e-learning 2.0, had a great circulation in the internet since 2005 when Stephen Downes mentioned this term first (cp. Downes, 2005). Social software increasingly is used by teachers and scientists supporting their lessons and courses, also students and even sometimes pupils use them for their personal learning. But in the current context of education still mostly the already web-

affine educators, knowledge workers and young digital learners are reached and accomplished in implementing these tools with different learning methods. To get a broader audience especially the mostly non-digital it is necessary to use other diffusion formats like conferences and symposiums to design the future of education. Out of the cognition of many conference participants that the most interesting discussions take place at the coffee break and not in the 20 to 30 minutes of presentation emerges the concept of BarCamps.

The new event format EduCamp developed from the requirement of exchange in a permanently

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growing edu-community in the internet and also from the ambition to get more people in contact with new trends in education. The EduCamp wants to bring together all education-interested people, especially scientists, teachers as well as entrepreneurs and is increasingly reaching the young digital generation, too.

In the following article there will be given information about the origins and development of a dynamically evolving community which has established an open unconference format for exchange and discussion. Furthermore the key principles and main important aspects of managing and planning an EduCamp will be clarified. Moreover it will be pointed out which distinctions towards traditional conferences exist, which elements from this are combined with the EduCamp principles and which challenges of arranging such an event have to be considered. At least the future aspects in giving perspectives for the next EduCamps and showing some examples of resulting projects will be explained.

2 BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS

To give an overview about the current situation of the EduCamp there should be an explanation over the roots of this conference concept at first. Therefor BarCamps and their origins are characterized and afterwards the development of EduCamps in international context and in German-speaking regions are represented.

2.1 What is a BarCamp?

As mentioned the foundations of EduCamp go back to the concept of BarCamps which are described as “an open and participative unconference whose order procedure and topics are predefined by the participants themselves.” (Wikipedia, 2009a) All people who can bring useful aspects in or learn informative things from the

developing web community are invited to become participants of this events.

Originally BarCamps were established as counter events to the Foo Camps of the publisher and web 2.0-term inventor Tim O'Reilly who arranged his annual conference only for exclusive invited guests the so called “Friends of O'Reilly” (Foo) since 2003. As the two terms “foo” and “bar” are both placeholder in programming languages the initiators named their open meeting BarCamp to clarify the contrast in both concepts. The first Barcamp took place in August 2005 in Palo Alto, California. From there on the number increased exponentially and then differentiated in their thematic focusing (HealthCamps, TourismusCamps, Wordcamps, Bibcamps etc.)(Figure 1).

In 2006 also the first BarCamps in Germany and German-speaking regions were organized at the same time in Berlin and Wien (cp. Gassner, 2006; Patzig, 2007a; Wikipedia, 2009a).

“BarCamps are organized from enthusiasts for enthusiasts who want to learn and share their knowledge in an open environment.” This is how Franz Patzig (2007a) one of the first BarCamp organisers in Germany describes the principles. Organisers coordinate the scope but the main content is realized by the participants themselves. The aim is a non-passive audience. All BarCampers are considered as more or less active players in the event by giving a session, moderating a discussion, blog or twitter about it, stream and record it and so on. The topics mainly concentrate on web trends. A special session plan evolves initially on location itself in a welcome round after everybody gave a short introduction of his person in about three keywords, called tags. Then every speaker who wants to give a session offers his topic and asks for interested persons. Afterwards the time slots and rooms are assigned. In general it is possible to set as many parallel sessions as rooms are available. Typically they last 30 minutes. Locations and catering are regularly supported by sponsoring of firms and the attendance is free (cp. Gassner, 2006; Patzig 2007a).

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