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TOPICS

DESIGN OF CONFERENCE PARAMETERS

THE RED BOOK

Radisson **sas**
HOTELS & RESORTS

THE CONFERENCE ROOM OF THE FUTURE

The purpose of this document is to establish rules of thumb for the physical parameters of the conference. We present five topics which those who provide or use conference facilities can use to their advantage when fitting out conference venues:

- > FLEXIBILITY
- > MULTIFUNCTIONALITY
- > DYNAMIC AND MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE
- > EXPLOITING THE SPECIAL NATURE OF A VENUE: GENIUS LOCI
- > SPACE TO COMMUNICATE

The basic assumption is that physical parameters should support a conference's objectives, messages and effectiveness, and thereby its results.

A space which has been specially fitted out for a specific conference will produce better results because it enables optimal communication results. The table we sit at is of significance to the communication process: will we be able to see each other or only the lecturer? Will we be able to take notes or concentrate on what's on the board?

In the case of lengthy conferences, comfort is vital for maintaining concentration levels. But are we most productive when we sit passively? And how important are lighting, acoustics and colour schemes for conference delegates?

TOPIC 1: FLEXIBILITY

Nowadays more and more companies are building their operations up around project-based groups. Research shows that working in groups produces greater satisfaction with the decision-making process and that delegates are keener to see them implemented. In the case of the work space, teamwork is best reflected in the open-plan office. When it comes to conference facilities, increased flexibility is required; ie. being able on a day-to-day basis to accommodate different types of conferences in the same space and building, and in future to easily integrate as yet unknown activities.

WHY : A conference consists of a number of stages. The first part, for example, is the briefing. In the second part an attempt is made to solve the problem. In the third part a number of decisions are made. Every stage requires something different of the space. If unexpected or alternative options develop, or if the conference goes “wrong”, the space should be able to adapt itself.

HOW IN THE CASE OF A BUILDING: The dynamic conference requires facilities which permit delegates to move around freely, split up into smaller groups and work alone for awhile. In order to allow for more dynamic conference behaviour, it is important to involve the building as a whole and also its surroundings, so that many different types of space are available to conference delegates. The plain space must be furnished in such a way that it can easily accommodate a variety of activities.

HOW IN THE CASE OF SPACE AND FURNITURE: It is a matter of being able to create several types of conference rooms in one. Delegates must be able to move effortlessly from a major seminar to project work in smaller groups and back to the presentation of the results without leaving the room.



**HOW IN THE
CASE OF
SPACE AND
FURNITURE:**

The flexible conference space can be created using mobile screens, curtains or horizontal folding walls. Acoustic arrangements can be adjusted to prevent the various groups from disturbing each other.

Some stages in a lengthy conference will benefit from abundant daylight, while other phases will function best in total darkness. Artificial light and natural daylight can therefore be used as deliberate effects in the space: The light can change the focus and mood of a space, in support of the activity which is in progress. Lamps, for example, can be lowered over tables during group work and then raised again up beneath the ceiling during a discussion in full session.

If furniture is light and mobile it is easy for delegates to change the conference room themselves. Furniture can be designed in such a way that it signals delegates to empower themselves and change the way a space is arranged so that it suits the conference's actual method of working.

Secondary furniture such as cupboards, screens, audiovisual equipment etc. can be incorporated into walls and ceilings, so that it is obvious what are fixed installations and what is mobile. Tables can be raised and lowered so they can be used for both seated and standing activities, and they can be on wheels making it easy to move them. Conference tables should be of a type which can be arranged in a U-shape during presentations and in a circle during conferences where everyone must see each other.



Illustration:

Tine Klarskov

Extract of project

*"Flexible furniture for
future conferences"*

Kunstakademiets

Arkitektskole 2004



TOPIC 2: MULTIFUNCTIONALITY

Buildings that serve as conference or meeting spaces in the future must be multifunctional. They must contain new, alternative arrangements and functions. Of particular importance are combinations which were previously regarded as incompatible, but which new technology, new lifestyles etc. provide an opportunity to bring together.

WHY : Conference venues in the future must accommodate more than mere rooms, conference halls and restaurants. Multiple possibilities can create an increase in potential customers and thereby improve operations.

HOW IN THE CASE OF A BUILDING : In a section of the local library delegates will be able to seek out information which is unavailable on the Internet. A gallery can provide unexpected inspiration and a wine shop can mean that in a moment one will be talking about something quite different. A sports centre can provide a venue for a quick tournament in the break when delegates show other, equally important sides of themselves. In a multifunctional building delegates can plan their day in a more varied way.

**HOW ,
IN THE
CASE OF
SPACE AND
FURNITURE :** Areas which previously served only for movement, such as foyers and corridors, can acquire new roles. Transparent booths with photocopiers, fax and Internet access can be located in corridors, for example. Other booths can be group rooms for five people, galley kitchens or smoking areas. It is important to create alcoves and spaces with concrete offers in otherwise left-over areas. Those offers may be associated with the conference's main activities. Or they can be conceived in such a way as to support the conference's secondary, but equally important, networking activities. For example - effective areas to meet in.

The conference room itself must have the character of a "workshop", and be a stage for more active conference behaviour: you can draw on the walls, hundreds of magnets can be used to suspend things from or to move ideas and items about on the wall, as the discussion progresses. And the furniture does not have just a single function, but comes in shapes which you can sit on or by, lean against etc., or it can be piled up to create partitions, for example.

TOPIC 3: DYNAMIC AND MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES

Conference facilities must provide a dynamic and memorable experience. With their particular layout, they reflect and support the conference.

WHY : We should aim at spaces which possess a natural connection between activity and layout. It's not a matter of creating spectacular architecture – what might be called “form for form's sake” – but an impression which reflects a wide range of images. Ones which the delegates will remember. These reinforce identity, unity and the feeling of being something special. Variation in the size of rooms, layout and design will ensure that there is always a suitable venue for a conference.

HOW IN THE CASE OF BUILDINGS : Dynamic and a memorable experiences revolve around differences. The catchwords are diversity and innovative thinking. The choice of a “style” signals the company's values, culture and strategy to the outside world. The creation of “evocative rooms” can draw inspiration on a number of fronts. In Denmark we are known, amongst other things, for our ecology, democracy, our peculiar geography and history, design, architecture, sports and healthy lifestyle. Conference rooms which decidedly build on these traits will hold their own on the international market, because they will be thought of as the “originals”.

HOW IN THE CASE OF SPACE AND FURNITURE : It is all about having an overall concept of the particular character or mood that will be created, as opposed to merely heaping things together which may be nice in isolation. It's all about using transparent means of emphasising the differences: matt/gloss, light/dark, high/low, heavy/light, natural materials/ treated surfaces etc.

An overall concept will help underscore a particular image, a particular brand.

American psychologists believe they can prove that colours influence mood. Yellow is said to help increase concentration and composure, blue shades make people more amenable and relaxed, –pink calm, while grey arouses negative thoughts. Red is said to encourage aggression and conflict, while black engenders a sense of power. The reality of a room is hardly related so directly to its colour scheme, but certainly materials, colours, surfaces, light and shapes can together create highly evocative environments. However, to navigate around the infinite possibilities an overall vision of what one stands for is essential.

TOPIC 4: EXPLOITING THE SPECIAL NATURE OF A VENUE: GENIUS LOCI

Conference facilities should exploit the potential in the local environment's special character. If there are resources stowed away in the vicinity - use them!! If not, get them!

The word "venue" means two things in this context: location and situation. There is the physical location with its diverse geographical potential, vegetation, surrounding buildings etc., for example by the sea or in a town, which combine to create the essential nature of the venue. Situation, on the other hand is an understanding of the area's character.

How do we arrive there, and what do we see before we arrive there? What are the trends in the area and its character?

HOW : The objective is to brand individual hotels and conference centres. The method is "story telling", picturing a venue and its special potential.

HOW IN THE CASE OF THE BUILDING: The architecture must express the fact that the venue, building and activities interact. For example, if the sea is close by, draw attention to the fact by using it in a way guests will not forget. This may be in a physical sense, recordings of the sounds of the sea, information about water temperature or direct images of the beach. If a forest is the closest resource, point out a particular woodland path or site an outdoor meeting area in the woods or on the edge of the woods. In built-up areas you can draw attention to the intensity of urban life and a particular route to the town centre.

HOW IN THE CASE OF SPACE AND FURNITURE: The district's special cultural resources, materials, industry, museums or history should be clearly reflected in the choice of colours, furniture, technology and materials. If there are green areas close by, find the "right" view from the premises. Not necessarily as a panorama of the whole area but as a small section. If this is not possible, make a reference: an attractive carpet, a painting the eyes can rest on or a plant which brings the surroundings into the room.

TOPIC 5: SPACE TO COMMUNICATE

Regardless whether a new building is concerned, or existing conference facilities are being rebuilt, it is important to relate to the potential in information and communications technology.

HOW: Information and communications technology are the direct cause of changes in both physical and social space. Video conferencing, telephony, and the Internet represent a challenge to physical meetings. As the cost of equipment which combines video and voice falls significantly it is probable that large sums will in future be invested in the development of this area.

HOW IN THE CASE OF BUILDINGS: To meet the needs of conference delegates, resources should be available which assist them most effectively in their work, namely ideas and solutions. In the case of computer-assisted work this means the tools which can rapidly pick up output, share and archive it. Products like electronic and interactive “notice boards”, where work is done direct on the big screen are examples of new and effective methods of communication. Provide access to e-mail, voicemail and Internet at suitable points in the building.

Face-to-face conversation is still the best kind of meeting. Here there is a considerable level of certainty that everyone will understand discussions and agreements. After all the potential of video conferencing, telephony, and the mobile Internet is so great that the equipment should be available at a number of conference centres.

HOW IN THE CASE OF SPACE AND FURNITURE: Space and fittings must be able to absorb rapid changes in such a way that the space is not dominated by random cabling. So build hardware into the walls or local portals. Ensure that there are sufficient sockets in the floor, walls and ceiling. And monitor the development of intelligent tables, chairs and surfaces when refitting conference facilities.

Remember that change is most rapid in the field of technology: technology will be out of date long before the furniture has worn out. Solutions must therefore be sufficiently flexible to absorb new and as yet unknown technology.

With support from the Ministry of Industry and Financial Affairs eight leading Danish conference businesses and a number of selected information environments have got together for a project known as the “The concept of the conference of the future”.

The project’s objective is to rethink and redraw the contours of one of the niches in the conference market of the future: “The training conference”. The conclusion is that the recipe for a training conference has five main ingredients:

- > **DIALOGUE** between organiser and venue about the conference’s objectives and expected results, with the venue sharing responsibility for conference content.
- > **PARTICIPATION** for all conference delegates meeting, so that the conference’s own resources are exploited to the full.
- > **DESIGN** of the conference’s parameters, so that the shape and function of the area supports the learning process and creativity.
- > **DIGITISATION** of information and resources, so the conference has an effective “search engine” for learning and innovation.
- > **DRAMATISATION** of conference content and its processes, so the conference raises and motivates the delegates’ commitment.

The eight companies involved in the project are: Comwell a-s, DGI-byen, Hilton Copenhagen Airport, Hotel Legoland, Hotel Nyborg Strand, Odense Congress Center, Radisson SAS Hotels & Resorts and Øksnehallen.

The knowledge environments taking part are Learning Lab Denmark, Kunstakademiets Arkitektsskole, Meeting Professionals International and Wonderful Copenhagen and Danmarks Turistråd (the Danish Tourist Board), which have created a joint secretariat for the project.

This publication covers the topic of PARTICIPATION and describes new techniques, which conference delegates can adopt and learn from each other. Publications are produced by Learning Lab Denmark, v. Ib Ravn and Nina Tange.