Creative Process Design for the Experiential Meeting Industry
A Conceptual Development of Meeting Rooms

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Abstract

In the post-industrial society creativity and knowledge are the new business resources. The experiences and creative industry as well as new creative demands in traditional industry set pressure on the meeting industry to promote and enhance the creative processes during business meetings. Business investing in conferences and creative workshops will demand increased return on investment.

This study integrates theories of the creative process with the design of meeting environments. We used benchmarking of established meeting rooms as a platform to develop a new concept of meeting room design. Using the theory of *Interactive Creativity Landscape* we developed the concept of the *Creative Meeting Environment*, *CME*. This concept is based on how the human brain and the creative process interact with different design parameters of the meeting room. We focused on the design parameters *view and lighting*, *organic patterns and colors, sound* and *spatial design*. Theses were analysed in the light of the creativity process to develop the *CME* with suggestions of conceptual design for meeting rooms. We suggest that the *CME* constitutes of three different creative rooms for *action*, *interaction* and *retreat* designed to support the creativity process. The results have applications for the meeting industry by providing new design ideas for meeting settings. This is a first step towards the understanding of how design and creativity can be combined to improve the design of meeting rooms. We conclude that the meeting rooms need to be flexible and adaptable with bio-inspiring sensory stimuli to enhance creativity.

Introduction

Creative industries have become increasingly important within the modern post-industrial economies. Globalization, knowledge, communication and an increased interconnectedness have forced business into new creative solutions and activities to meet the new demands of the contemporary society (Tinagli *et al.*, 2007). The present transformation of the society was forecasted by many several authors such as Alvin Toffler (1970), Gerhald Schulze (1992) and Peter Drucker (1993) who foresaw new values in the society such as knowledge, innovations, creativity and experiences.

To keep competitive positions on the global market creative business have to focus on attention management (Davenport and Beck 2001) and experience (O´Sullivan and Spangler 1998, Pine and Gilmore1999, Smith 2003 Andersson and Andersson 2006, Boswijk et al 2007) and become more transparent and encompass a broad range of activities (Fridlund & Furingsten, 2006). As a consequence of the increasing consumption of culture and experiences creativity has become a growing force of economic growth (Florida, 2002; FUNK, 2006).

The concept of *experience society* was introduced by Alvin Toffler (1970), analysed by Schulze (1992) and Druckner (1993) and made commonly known as the *experience economy* by Pine and Gilmeore (1999). Recently the concept has been summarized, analysed and elaborated by several authors (Andersson and Andersson 2006, Berridge 2007, Boswijk et al 2007 among others). In 1999 the Swedish Knowledge Foundation introduced the concept of *experience industry* in Sweden (KK-stiftelsen 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006) to identify, promote and boost Sweden's competitiveness in the fast growing creativity industry. In its taxonomy of the experience industry the Swedish Knowledge Foundation included tourism and its branches implicating that tourism should be part of the creative industry offering something more then just basic tourist services. In this paper we focus on creativity within the Meeting industry branch within tourism.

Like the rest of the creative industry the meeting industry has evolved and increased in growth during the past decade and become a global and fast growing business sector (Weber & Kaye, 2002). Despite the expansion of the meeting industry it has not yet attracted much research interest and still lack basic data on the local and global effects of convention tourism and meetings (Weber & Kaye, 2002). To met the demands of the experience economy the meeting industry is in a process of developing new forms of meeting environments to provide the work space that are required for creativity and experiences and to ensure return on investment in the form of creative and innovative solutions to business problems. Our aim in this paper is to investigate how theory of experience and creativity can be integrated with the design of meeting environments within the meeting industry.

The Experience
Within the experience economy the concept of *the experience* is of central interest but rarely analysed (Gelter 2006). The word experience has a dual conceptualization in the English language (Gelter, 2006 Lash 2006, Boswijk et al 2007), first the noun experience as *erfahrung* [Swedish *erfarenhet*] meaning skills, understandings, know-how etc. The second conceptualization *erlebung* [Swedish *upplevelse*] is both a noun - event, happening etc. and a verb – feelings, live through, suffer, come across etc (Gelter, 2007). According to Snel (2005) is *erfahrung* a progressive process of "… *giving and taking, causes and consequences, and action and reflection* …" (Snel, 2005, p.4). *Erfahren* is more of participating in an *event of meaning* in which the individual's *life horizon* is involved and affect the person not only within the context but as

well outside the limits of the context on a longer basis (Snel, 2005). *Erlebnis* is on the other hand more of an isolated and immediate event (Snel, 2005). Snel claims that erlebnis only has a meaning within the specific context it occurs, it still has a meaning for the individual but it is more of an isolated event that affects the individual in a shorter perspective (Snel, 2005).

In designing experiences it is thus fundamental to understand the differences as well as the interconnectedness between the *erlebnis* and *erfahrung* sides of experience. In the context of business meetings the situational *erlebnis* within the meeting room is assumed to lead to *erfahrung* which means that the experiences within a meeting in the form of attentions, emotions, feelings, communications and happenings (events) room should result in learning and a accumulated experience. The later could be expressed in new insights, new knowledge, new skills etc. Thus the *erlebnis* in the business meeting context could focus on Pine and Gilmore´s (1999) experience realm of education. But as entertainment is becoming of increased importance in education in the form of Edutainment (Pine and Gilmore 1999) educational experiences should be staged and enriched to include all four experience realms of entertainment, education, aesthetics and escapism according to the experience economy theory proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999). This suggests that produced experiences as *erlebnis*, when purposefully designed and staged can contribute to business meetings learning outcomes in the form of new *erfahrung* for participants and organisations.

Creativity

Creativity s proposed to involve two components: *generation of novelty* – i.e. divergent thinking and *evaluation of the novelty* – i.e. convergent thinking (Cropley, 2006). This implies that creativity do not emerge only from divergent thinking but also requires convergent thinking (Cropley, 2006). G. Wallas (1926) identified about 80 years ago the *classical phase* model for the creative process: *preparation*, *incubation*, *illumination* and finally the phase of *verification* (Cropley, 2006). Empirical studies on how people obtain new ideas have been doubtful regarding the validity of this phase model (Cropley, 2006). Cropley therefore extends this model by adding three more phases: information, communication and finally validation (Cropley, 2006). Information is the first phase, as knowledge about the problem is required to put pressure on the divergent thinking (Cropley, 2006). To be able to communicate new ideas is an essential phase in the creative process to achieve closure, as well as validation as a final phase to judge new ideas in a relevant way (Cropley, 2006).

The Interactive Creativity Landscape, ICL

Organizational work environment are increasingly designed to support creativity and innovation processes, although a consistent theoretical frame for such endeavour has not been developed yet (Haner, 2005). Creativity oriented design of work environment requires an understanding of the principles of the underlying processes and their spatial implications (Haner, 2005). The Interactive Creativity Landscape was designed as a work environment supporting creativity and innovation processes (Haner, 2005). The Wallace phases of the creativity processes were the basis for the development of the Interactive Creativity Landscape, ICL (Figure 2:1) (Haner, 2005). Every phase of the creativity process requirements are the basis for the spatial interpretation, which has been developed for each of the phases. The preparation phase should support *information access* and *communication* while the incubation and insight phases should support *diversion*, *playfulness* and *border crossing* (Haner, 2005). The phase of elaboration and evaluation should support *documentation*, *visualization*, *discussion* and *collaboration* (Haner, 2005). It has been shown that if the preparation, elaboration and evaluation phases are

dominated by convergent activities the incubation and insight are consisting of divergent activities (Figure 2:1) (Haner, 2005).
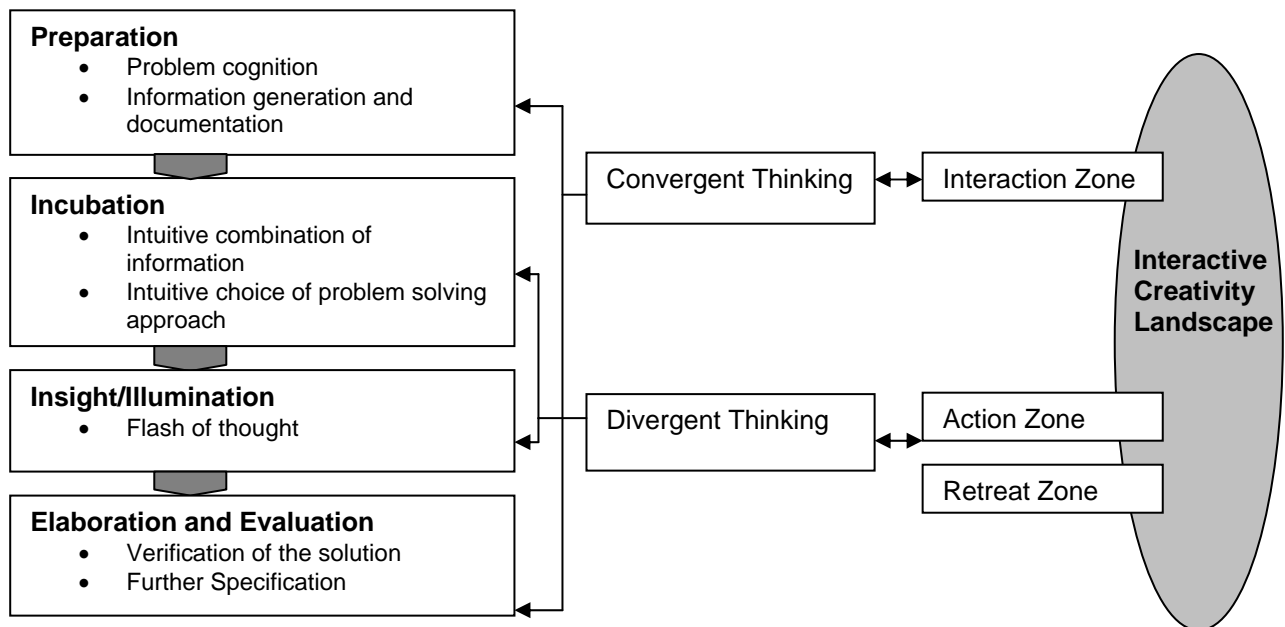
Preparation
- Problem cognition
- Information generation and documentation

Incubation
- Intuitive combination of information
- Intuitive choice of problem solving approach

Insight/Illumination
- Flash of thought

Elaboration and Evaluation
- Verification of the solution
- Further Specification

Convergent Thinking ↔ Interaction Zone

Divergent Thinking ↔ Action Zone

Retreat Zone

Interactive Creativity Landscape

Figure 2:1 The Concept of the Interactive Creativity Landscape, ICL (Haner, 2005, p.7).

Based on the creativity processes different zones have been implemented within the ICL, these are an action zone, interaction zone and a retreat zone (Figure 2:1) (Haner, 2005). The action zone support divergent thinking and is a very open zone with spaces for diverse activities and a wide variety of communication and information channels are available (Haner, 2005). The interaction zone, on the other hand, is supporting more planed and co-ordinated interactions between people (Haner, 2005). The retreat zone is conceptualised as a more individual and separated space supporting privacy (Haner, 2005). For the, ICL, the spatial design allows for and support activities requiring both convergence and divergence activities (Haner, 2005).

Bio-inspired Design

E. O. Wilson argues that as the human brain has evolved in a biocentric world, humans are more likely to feel comfortable with attributes of nature as the nature has had consequences for human survival and reproduction (Wilson, 1984; Heerwagen, 2001). Rachel Kaplan investigated office workers with natural and man-made elements in their view from the workplace. Her study showed that the workers were more satisfied with a more green view which also was found to correlate with patience, enthusiasm for work and health (Nature & Health, 2004). This implies that design influences well-being and that bio-inspired design will be an important component of design of human environment. This includes bio-inspired spatial design of light, coloration, sound and working environments.

Regular exposure to full-spectrum lightning or increased intensity of light has improved well-being by increasing the melatonin production in the brain (Schweitzer *et al.*, 2004). Poorly designed indoor light causes headache, loss of concentration, add to eye fatigue, stress and vision problem (Schweitzer *et al.*, 2004; Küller & Wetterberg, 1996). The typical work environment often has fluorescent light which differs from natural light. High-intensity artificial light, 2000 and 3000 lux, tends to elicit stressful reactions caused by an increased metabolic activity (Malnar & Vodvarka, 2004). Flicker from fluorescent lights are not consciously perceived but still affect the brain in a negative way by causing stress and an

increased stress level. A study on a test group showed that the participants performed 50 % lower by flickering lights (Küller, 2006).

Different colors affect moods and behaviour and some colors encourage activity while some encourage passive behaviour (Schweitzer *et al.*, 2004). Red colors have shown to enhance functions in the autonomic nervous system like tension and excitement but red has also shown to cause reactions like anger and anxiety for infants (Malnar & Vodvarka, 2004). Studies at Yale University has sowed that the color red detrimentally affects problem solving, decision making and conversation and increase bodily activity (Malnar & Vodvarka, 2004). Blue color on the other hand tends to be physically calming and studies have shown that colors that cause positive moods tend to increase problem-solving and enhance long-term memory (Malnar & Vodvarka, 2004). Green rooms perceived open, quite and associated to peacefulness while yellow rooms where perceived warmer and lively as blue rooms where perceived more open, colder and peaceful with associations to water and vacation (Hårleman, 2006). Research have shown that brain activity increased in a room with strong colors and that warm colors activates the brain while cold colors have a more stress reductive affect (Küller, 2006; Janssens, 2006).

Sound is used in therapy and studies of vibroacoustics have shown that benefits are well-documented such as lowering blood pressure, pulse and respiration (Spear, 2006). Research today shows that body rhythms can be accelerated or decelerated by music. Pieces being played at approximately 60 beats per minute, the ideal rate of the human heart at rest, have shown to temporarily slow breathing and heart beat (Spear, 2006). Without sound visual perception tends to be different in the sense of less contrast, less informative as well as less attention-demanding (Malnar & Vodvarka, 2004). According to Orians (2005) sound levels for well-being should not rise above natural sounds of nature but which is not equal to no sounds.

The wakefulness of the brain is dependent by sensory input from light, color, visual patterns and sound (Küller & Wetterberg, 1996). When the brain receives strong and complex sensory signals the cortical arousal seems to increase influencing the state of consciousness affecting the attention (Küller & Wetterberg, 1996). Monotonous stimulation might on the other hand have an opposite result causing inhibition (Küller & Wetterberg, 1996). Visual complexity indicates higher arousal in the brain and similar result were found for studies on warm red and yellow colors compared to cold green and blue colors which did not indicate higher arousal (Küller & Wetterberg, 1996).

The Experiential Meeting Industry

The experience industry is changing the meeting industry as an answer to the ever increasing demand for experiences and creativity to strengthen competitiveness. The emphasis today is on creative work as creativity is a growing force for economic growth. Arranging meetings for the experience industry requires therefore new approaches and this conceptual development of meeting rooms is a contribution to the experiential meeting industry. Working creatively is a process requiring input in form of resources which for this study is the participants in the meeting as well as the meeting room. The meeting itself is also a process in form of through put meaning experiences both *erfahrung – reflection* and *erlebnis – creativity* (Figure 3:1) (Snel, 2005; Hörte, 1995). Both *erfahrung* and *erlebnis* are required as they are interconnected as *erfahrung* as an experience has an analytical nature affecting the individual on a deeper level involving a learning aspect as well as a process of reflection which is fundamental for the creative process. *Erlebnis* as an experience is on the other hand more isolated with a creative character, making impression within the specific context (Figure 3:1).
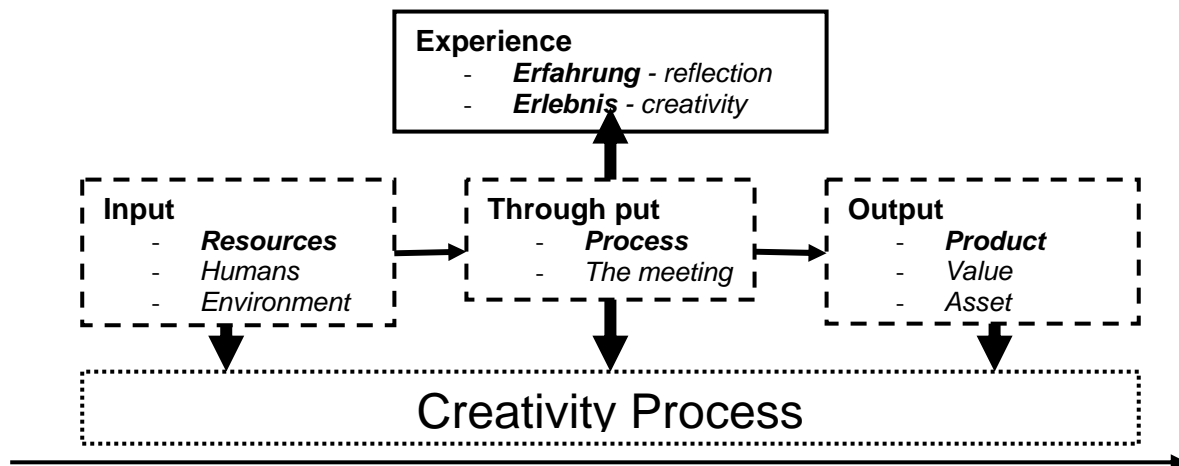
Figure 3:1 The Production Process, extended from Hörte (1995).

Thus *erfahrung* and *erlebnis* are required for the creativity process as the output of the meeting is to result in solving a task or a product and support assets for both participants as well as the business investing in the meeting by creating values in form of better return on investment. Although a new approach for designing meeting rooms have been on the agenda for a while it is important to ensure that both *erfahrung* and *erlebnis* are considered as it is important that the whole brain are involved in the creative process. Creative meeting rooms provide participants with new experiences by using both bio inspired design and opportunity to change environment and rest from the creative process. Designing meeting environments with broaden sensory stimuli according to our study will be a new approach supposing to affect both on a longer and shorter basis. Focusing on creating assets for businesses in the experience industry when it comes to consider experiences and creativity will be an advantage when arranging meetings as the experience industry are here to stay.

The Creative Meeting Environment, CME

The concept of Interactive Creativity Landscape, developed by Haner (2005) as a work environment, is based on the creativity phases presented in figure 2:1. Each creativity phase is supported by different activities which are presented under each phase (Figure 2:1). The four phases are used as a fundament for the creativity zones interaction, action and retreat, which is furthered developed from divergent and convergent thinking. These creativity zones, as an extension of the creativity phases, are resulting in the Interactive Creativity Landscape which for this study is developed accommodative for the meeting industry. The ICL model has for the conceptual development of this study been extended from the Wallace creativity phases including two more phases information and communication (Figure 3:2) (Haner, 2005; Cropley, 2006).
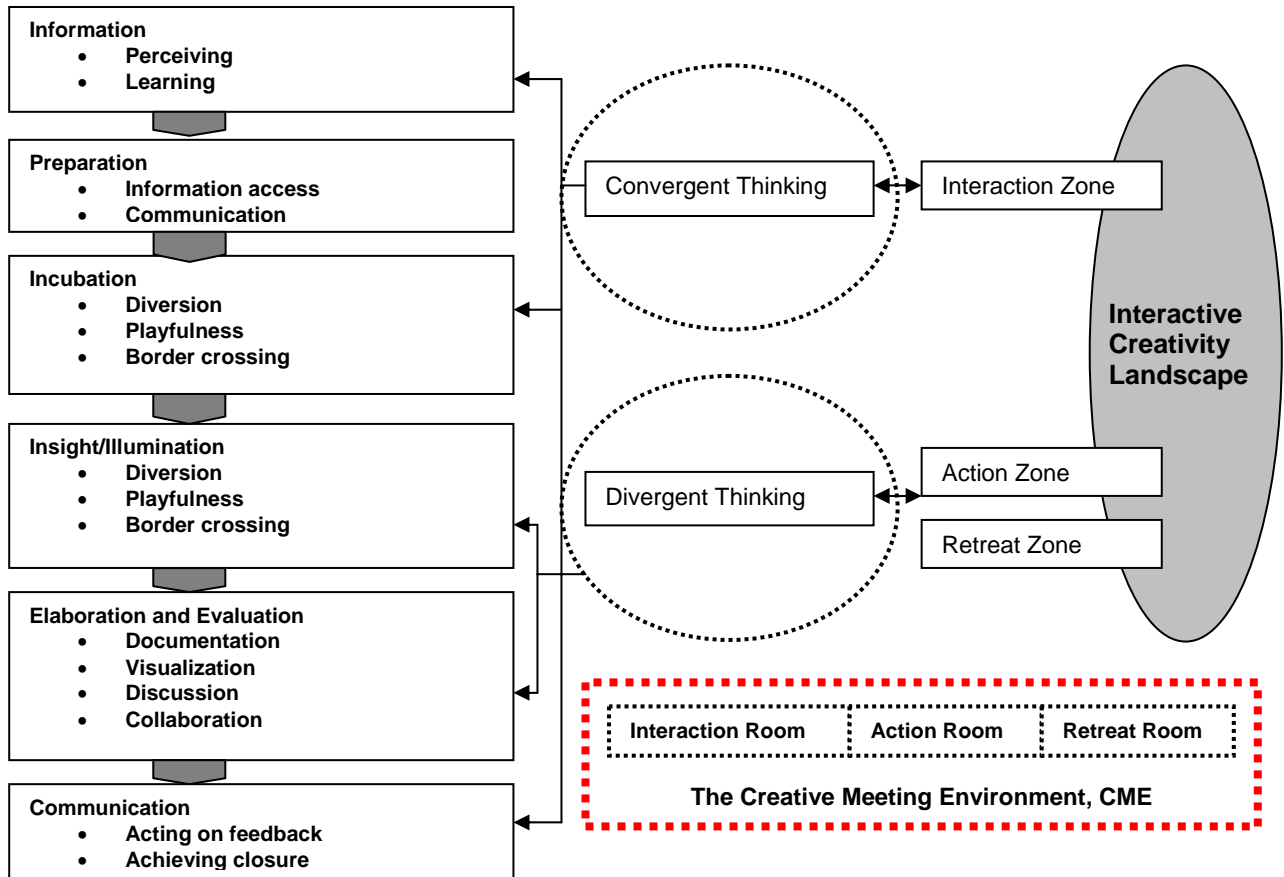
Figure 3:2 The Concept of the *Interactive Creativity Landscape*, **ICL (Haner, 2005) extended for the meeting environment as the** *Creative Meeting Environment*, **CME.**

Information is according to Cropley (2006) crucial as knowledge is required about the problem to solve and to put pressure on the divergent thinking. *Communication* is the second added phase as the ability to communicate the new ideas is essential for the creative process to achieve closure for the process (Cropley, 2006). One way to adapt the meeting room using ICL is to have flexible and dynamic rooms that are changed according to the phases in the creative process. Another implication is to have separate rooms for the different phases, as suggested in figure 3:2. Our proposal for such an approach is to have different rooms for different zones, *interaction*, *action* and *retreat*, to meet the requirements of each phase in the creativity processes (Haner, 2005). Together they form the *Creative Meeting Environment*, *CME* (Figure 3:2) which has been extended from the ICL theory with each phase based on certain activities to support the creative process presented below.

Creativity Phase

The preparation phase should according to Haner (2005) support information access, interaction as well as formal and informal communication, and this phase is a convergent activity focusing on the approach, trying to identify the problem (Cropley, 2006). As the preparation phase sets goals it is an interactive phase and according to Haner it is a so call *interaction zone* which are extended for the CME to an **interaction room**. Incubation and insight are characterized by diversion, playfulness and border-crossing and is a divergent activity, making associations and building networks (Haner, 2005; Cropley, 2006). These phases should support open spaces for diverse activities with a variety of communication and information channels, producing multiple answers and seeing new possibilities. Incubation and insight are

open for new solutions, shifting perspective, and according to Haner (2005) these phases are characterized by both action zones and retreat zone as creativity requires time away from the problem as well as focusing on the problem. Brainstorming is a typical divergent activity, producing multiple ideas and perspectives, performed in an action zone, providing diverse stimuli, as it requires appreciable presence. The incubation and insight phase aims to build networks and is open for new solutions making associations. For the CME model is these zones extended to the **action room** and the **retreat room**.

Creativity needs both open-minded playfulness with a variety of stimuli and concentration which therefore requires pauses, which can allow a more integrated mental picture of the problem to solve (Claxton, 2001). Returning to a problem after a break, taking a new fresh approach, misleading assumptions may dissolve away (Claxton, 2001). These creativity phases are characterized by supporting documentation, visualization, discussion and collaboration through convergent activities (Haner, 2005). These phases support planed and co-ordinated interactions between participants and could be seen as an interaction zone such as the preparation phase. As preparation, these phases focus on the approach making decisions as a closure for the creativity process.

Creative Meeting Environment

The concept of the *Creative Meeting Environment* has four parameters being identified as important for physical design of work environments, *view and light*, *organic patterns and colors*, *sound* and *spatial design*. These parameters have then been developed for each room, *interaction*, *action* and *retreat* for the Creative Meeting Environment which according to our proposal is suggested to be different rooms and designed accordingly to required design parameters.

Interaction Room

The interaction room should support planed and co-ordinated interactions between participants supporting and also provide a variety of information channels to support communication.

» *View and light* – the interaction room should have mostly daylight and no fluorescent lighting. Loss of natural lights affects work performance and environments without windows disturb ability to concentrate and cooperate, therefore view over the nature is an important factor.
» *Organic patterns and colors* – yellow is warm color which is perceived lively and therefore could be appropriate for an interactive room. Warm colors indicate to support creativity and for an interaction room which is supposed to enhance interactions, yellow is a preferable color for such activities.
» *Sound* – the interaction room needs good acoustics and as visual perception tends to be less attention-demanding without sound this room need sound to support interaction. The sound should not rise above that of natural nature sound and no subtle sounds like fans and clocks which can be attention-demanding, increase stress and affect in a negative way.
» *Spatial design* – when designing a meeting environment provide participants with the opportunity to meet and engage spontaneously to create an informal work environment. There should be possible to move between interaction and privacy with the ability to move between areas for the opportunity to distance for privacy and conversation without disturbing to enhance interaction.

Action Room

The action room is based on divergent activities and requires therefore a space that supports openness, diverse activities, a wide variety of communication, border-crossing and playfulness. The action room is an active space requiring spatial design which supports an increased activity.

» *View and light* – provide the room with mostly daylight as that affects performance in a positive way.
» *Organic patterns and colors* – red enhance functions in the autonomic nervous system like tension and excitement which increase bodily activity. High visual complexity increase activities in the brain but many-coloured patterns could also cause stress. Red also enhances bodily activity and has a positive influence as it perceived comfortable and therefore suitable for an action room.
» *Sound* – another fundamental factor is to have good acoustics and visibility to support learning and information sharing in a work environment. The action room should therefore not be quite as that may deteriorate communication. Sound should not rise above that of natural nature sound and it is important not to have subtle sounds like fans and clocks which can be attention-demanding and increase stress.
» *Spatial design* – regarding spatial design should static table and chair arrangement be avoided and instead use smaller tables to stand around to provide participants to move around to enhance communication. This may provide the participants with more information channels as they have the opportunity to communicate more spontaneously.

Retreat Room

The retreat room is a comfortable environment offering relaxation in an individual and separated space that supports privacy. When designing a retreat room there are a number of factors to consider such as low sensory stimulation as this is a relaxing and quite room. Incubation varies in time and it is during this phase that novelties are generated, during time away from the problem.

» *View and light* – the retreat room should provide participants with a view over nature. There should also be a room with daylight which affects human positively and an object to install for this room is an open fire as that provides the room with a comfortable atmosphere.
» *Organic patterns and colors* – cold colors such as blue and green are perceived more quite and calm and have stress reductive affects. Blue is physically calming and perceived open with associations to water. Cold colors should therefore be used in the retreat room as this room should provide the opportunity to relax. Connection to natural environments like daylight, view of nature, natural ventilation, plants and natural and fractal patterns for the layout are factors to consider when designing for well-being as that offers a sensory variability and an interesting visual surrounding.
» *Sound* – sound level should not be above that of natural nature sound and no subtle sounds like fans which can affect humans in a negative way should occur. Sound indicates to have positive affects on humans such as lowering blood pressure, pulse and respiration. 60 hertz is the ideal rate of the human heart at rest and therefore is music played at 60 beats per minute affecting humans in a positive way. The retreat room should therefore not be quite and instead have sound similar of nature or peaceful music with no more than 60 beats per minute.
» *Spatial design* – it is important for the spatial design to consider having low sensory stimulation, not causing an increased level of arousal in the brain as this is a relaxing room

were the brain should recover from the creative work. The retreat room should be designed for well-being consisting of natural attributes like plants and other fractal patterns surrounding the participants. Designing for well-being reduces stress and increase the ability to concentrate as the human brain has evolved in a natural and fractal environment.

Discussion

In the light of the experience economy meeting rooms today are in need of further development as the demand from the businesses investing in meetings and conferences require better increased return on investment. Besides the economical requirements, an increasingly demand for experiences are affecting businesses as they move into the experience industry. The aim for this study was to investigate how the experience industry might change conferences when experiences and creativity are the new business resources creating competitiveness. The meeting room was the focus for this study and to accomplish a conceptual development of *creative meeting environments* for the experiential meeting industry.

To contribute to the experience industry by enhancing experiential meetings, conference rooms are in need of furthered development regarding the environment to strengthen both the creative process when solving problems as well as the experience (Figure 4:1). The demands for experiences, both *erfahrung* causing the individual to change perspective on a longer basis and *erlebnis* which affects the individual in a shorter perspective, are fundamental for arranging conferences for businesses in the experience industry. Both *erfahrung* and *erlebnis* are interconnected and required for the learning and creative process as they support the ability to reflect and thereby start a process of progression, which on a longer basis affect businesses investing in meetings in a positive way.
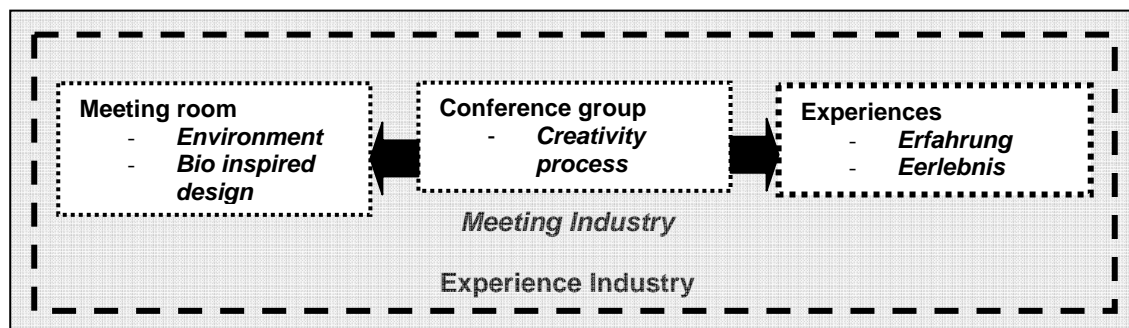

Figure 4:1 The Meeting Room in the Experience Context.

We therefore need more knowledge of how the human brain and the creative process interact with different design of meeting rooms. Our study has focused on parameters such as *view and lighting*, *organic patterns and colors*, *sound* and *spatial design*. The main endeavour for this study has been to investigate how to link these parameters to creativity processes as a fundament for a conceptual development of meeting rooms and the concept of *Creative Meeting Environment*, *CME*. The CME is extension of the concept of *Interactive Creativity Landscape*, *ICL* suggested by Haner (2005). The CME consist of the three creativity zones *action*, *interaction* and *retreat*. These zones we suggest to constitute different designed rooms for meetings to support each creativity phase:
» *The interaction room* is designed to enhance convergent thinking which requires information access and communication to support the creative process.
» *The action room* is designed to support an active work setting to enhance divergent thinking through diversity, border-crossing and playfulness.

» *The retreat room* is finally designed to provide time and space away from the problem working with, offering privacy and an opportunity for the brain to recover and reload before returning to the problem solving task.

Our suggestions to design such creativity rooms are based completely on theoretical concepts from theories borrowed from other areas that have impact on perception, creativity and design. The human brain and creativity is, in our opinion, far to complex to be defined under one single theory regarding how to design meeting rooms. This complex context requires further development by using different creativity theories and design parameters. This research is however a first attempt to link theory of creativity and theory of design within the application of meeting rooms. There will be no one single model to apply to all meetings and creativity situations but our results will be a start to test and further develop this area. The results from this study have applications for the meeting industry as well as the experience industry by providing new design ideas for meeting rooms and show the importance of meeting new demands from the experience industry to maintain competitiveness. This study is a first step of the understanding of how design and creativity can be combined to improve the design of present meeting rooms. Our research shows that the meeting rooms need to be flexible and adaptable to the different phases of the creative process for smaller conference groups working creatively.

Proposal for Future Research

Several aspects of the *Creative Meeting Environment*, *CME*, for creative meeting rooms presented in this study need to be evaluated in a lab environment in order to falsify or verify it. In addition to other theories about the creative process should be tested in relation to design of meeting rooms. The effect of the studied design factors such as light, sound, colors, fractal patterns and nature contact need further investigations in their impact on creative processes. Also other factors that might influence the creative process should be identified and tested. Another elaboration of the study is to compare meeting environments and their effectiveness for the creative process and return on investment for business. To test different parameters for their impact on the creative process, experiments in design and creative meeting processes should be conducted.

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