1. Introduction: the role of professional events in structuring careers and professions

Sidonie Naulin and Anne-Sophie Béliard

TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF PROFESSIONAL EVENTS

At the beginning of this project, our main question was quite straightforward: why do professionals keep attending face-to-face industry gatherings when digitization offers cheap, fast and time-saving technological solutions for professional interactions? The unexpected outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 set the stage for a real-world experiment as to what happens when face-to-face professional events can no longer be held. The health crisis threw the world of events into an unprecedented situation to which professionals had to quickly respond. In September 2020, at the opening ceremony of the CanneSéries festival, Fleur Pellerin, president of the festival and former French Minister of Culture announced, ‘CanneSéries will be the only series festival to be held live this year, so we have a special responsibility’. She went on to describe the choice to maintain a face-to-face event as an ‘act of resistance’ and invited on stage the presidents of other competing festivals, cancelled months earlier. The 2020 International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) Annual Statistics Study reported that just one in three of the 8409 events surveyed went virtual or hybrid during the pandemic. The other two-thirds were postponed, cancelled or relocated. These figures tend to confirm the importance of face-to-face professional events. The choice to postpone rather than hold online events could be an indicator of the importance of physical gatherings for professionals, professional groups and event organizers. Many features make face-to-face events valuable. They not only serve to configure a field, market or network (Getz, 2010; Moeran and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2011; Favre et al., 2016), but they also provide resources associated with their physical and locational aspects that can hardly be transferred online: conviviality for the participants and territorial attractiveness for the organiz-
ers and funders. These factors could lead us to view the Covid-19 crisis as a transitory period during which event organizers find temporary solutions to comply with health restrictions until face-to-face events can be restored. This book investigates how face-to-face professional events impact on professions, professionals and their careers.

In an era of online communications, face-to-face gatherings of individuals were paradoxically at the height of their success prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2019, the ICCA reported a count of 13,254 conventions, fairs and festivals worldwide, the largest number since its first inventory in 1963 (ICCA, 2019). This unprecedented growth was noted by both events industry professionals and social science researchers. Not only did the number of events – such as film festivals (Mezias et al., 2011), TV markets (Bielby and Harrington, 2008) and art fairs (Quemin, 2013) – increase on an international scale, but they also grew in size (Lecler, 2016). The success of events went hand in hand with the development and globalization of the event organizer market. In a historic development in event organization, growing numbers of professional sectors took on the services of professional event organizers rather than manage the organization themselves, as shown by the development of the ICCA since 1962. In many activity sectors, event agencies offered turnkey trade shows and bought up trade shows originally created by professional associations. This recent growth in events made them a strategic economic sector for public authorities, local administrations and the professionals concerned (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). The purpose of this book is to understand the role of events in professional spheres and probe how they can continue to thrive and grow in the digital era.

**Defining Professional Events**

‘Event’ is a fuzzy category. From an administrative point of view, the legislation distinguishes ‘fairs’ from ‘trade shows’. However, we choose to give professional events quite a broad definition widely shared by researchers analysing ‘trade shows’ (Aspers and Darr, 2011; Bathelt et al., 2014), ‘field-configuring events’ (Lampel and Meyer, 2008; Rüling, 2009) and ‘large-scale professional gatherings’ or ‘large-scale events’ (Nyqvist et al., 2017; Langen and Garcia, 2009). Professional events regularly gather professionals – often from the same activity sector – in a single location for a given period of time (one or more days). They are places to do business, conclude contracts, cultivate social networks, present awards and disseminate information. The professional events we study can take different forms: trade shows, fairs, congresses, conventions, exhibitions, summits and festivals. As the different chapters will show, some of them are open to consumers or the general public (such as festivals and fairs) and others are exclusively reserved for professionals (such as
trade shows); some are marketplaces and some are not. However, irrespective of the form these events take, we focus on the professional side of events and the fact that they provide meeting opportunities for professionals who rarely meet face-to-face.

**Events, Professions and Markets**

The purpose of this book is to show that face-to-face professional events can play a key role in structuring (new) occupational communities and careers, and that they can be instrumental in reconfiguring inequalities and hierarchies across professionals. We therefore analyse professional events through the lens of careers, professional structuring and sociability. A number of questions run through the ten chapters. To what extent does event management impact on individual career paths? How do business sector characteristics affect this impact? How does the events industry contribute to the visibility and internationalization of workers? How are events instrumental in structuring emerging professions and (re)affirming stable, shared professional identities? What is the link between the evolution of economic sectors and professional event trajectories?

By asking these questions, our book differs from other existing studies. Relationships between professions and events have been explored by the ‘field-configuring events’ (Lampel and Meyer, 2008) neo-institutionalist approach (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This literature shows how events contribute to producing collective identities (Bathelt et al., 2014), hierarchizing field participants and building the reputation of the field itself. By focusing on ‘fields’, these studies overlook the individual effects that events may have on the professional careers of the participants. Some chapters in this book address this issue at a micro-social level of analysis. The territorial aspects of events have been explored in part by economic geographers who define events as ‘cyclical clusters’ (Power and Jansson, 2008), which give professionals the opportunity to meet in the same place for a limited space of time. This approach points up the role of events in the dissemination of information and innovation in a given field (Aspers and Darr, 2011) and in the creation of international networks (Bathelt and Schuld, 2010). The economic dimension of events has been studied by economic sociologists analysing mainly competition, matching and price setting (Garcia-Parpet, 2005). They see events as marketplaces or ‘two-sided markets’ (Rochet and Tirole, 2003) in which competitors can observe each other (Skov, 2006; White, 1981, 2002). Fairs bring together two types of actors with a complementary demand: on one side, the attendees or visitors; on the other side, the exhibitors. The former attract the latter who are prepared to pay a high entry cost in order to meet them.
Our book’s originality is in its focus on the effects of professional events and their sociabilities on occupational fields and careers. This angle provides insights into the sociology of careers and the sociology of professions. We assume that a number of factors affect the role played by events in careers and professions in different sectors: the level of labour market informality, the degree of job market internationalization, uncertainty over the quality of workers, the extent of sector organization and the nature and size of the events. Moreover, we will see how event participation issues differ by professional category: organizers develop attendee-matching devices; attendees seek to do business formally or informally; and politicians promote the territory by supporting events.

**An Empirical Approach to Professional Events**

This book is the culmination of a research project funded by the French National Research Agency (ANR). Ten case studies were conducted by sociologists, management scholars and political scientists. They cover different economic sectors: new business lines (such as transmedia, Fab Labs, TV shows and wedding planning), globalizing sectors (such as business representation, fine dining and international trade exhibitions), and mature economic sectors (such as craft fairs, film festivals and the events sector itself). Each of the ten chapters is the result of several years of original empirical research in European countries (mostly France). The empirical cases are closely interwoven with theoretical analysis, placing the empirical research in the context of broader research questions. We strongly believe that empirical research is key to inform theoretical thinking on the role of events in contemporary occupational communities. There is also a great demand from event professionals and policymakers who regulate the sector for original research on events to be documented and produced.

The ten chapters are based on documentation, ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews, archives and quantitative data. Pictures also play a significant role in this book. Not only do they ‘represent’ the variety of professional events and trade shows to the reader, but they also highlight the very nature of trade shows in staging and showcasing an industry. The social and material organization of professional events is a crucial part of their function. This is why the Covid-19 pandemic and the massive cancellation and postponement of professional events sent seismic shockwaves through the events industry. The pandemic forced the industry to reconsider its organization. This raised new research questions, but it also placed a hurdle in the way of our empirical research. We used new research methods (online ethnography) and set up a new research project on the industry’s response to the pandemic in order to factor in this huge disruption. The book’s conclusion presents the
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first findings of this study. It would appear that the pandemic does not invalidate our pre-Covid results, which form the core substance of the chapters. As extensive as the Covid-driven changes are, it would be wrong to say that they altogether jeopardized the role of events in occupational communities.

SHOWCASING BUSINESSES AND SHAPING PROFESSIONS

The Explanatory Effect of Career Stage on Event Participation and Use

The collective research turns up two main findings regarding the relationship between professional event participation and careers. First, career stage can explain event participation. This result lends support to the idea that events form networks or ‘cyclical clusters’ (Power and Jansson, 2008) by highlighting the fact that there is an ecology of events in each professional sector. Not only are professional events ‘mutually dependent’ (Moeran and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2011: 5), but they are also complementary (with a few notable exceptions such as the Business 8, Business 7 and Business 20 events studied by Marieke Louis, Chapter 10). Event periodicity over the year theoretically allows for professionals to attend every event held for their occupational sector. However, professionals often make strategic choices by opting for one or the other event to meet their particular needs at a given stage in their career. These choices are guided by the different resources that professional events can provide at different stages of the career path. Indeed, no two events are the same. Size, accreditation cost and international openness vary from one event to another. Some professional events are open to non-professional visitors while others are strictly reserved for professionals. Each event offers different kinds of activities. In Chapter 4, Tatiana Rubtcova proposes a typology of three sorts of wedding events: standard wedding exhibitions open to the general public, ‘alternative’ wedding fairs and festivals (hybrid events that are partly for the general public and partly for professionals only) and events exclusively reserved for professionals (conventions, seminars and competitions). The further forward they are in their career, the more wedding planners tend to attend ‘alternative’ events, even becoming organizers of them. Anne-Sophie Béliard’s analysis of event sociabilities in Chapter 2 shows that newcomers to the TV industry, especially young scriptwriters, prefer smaller events that offer training activities and formal meeting settings, where it is easy to meet more experienced professionals and start to build social capital.

This first finding ties in with a second result. Professionals use each event in different ways at different stages of their careers. Studying the role played by festivals in professional recognition, Anne-Sophie Béliard (Chapter 2) shows that scriptwriters at the start of their careers use festivals as places to learn
and socialize. Later in their careers, festivals become places to network (and maintain their network), reward their work (with award ceremonies) and help young newcomers in return for the assistance they received when starting out (the most experienced scriptwriters give training sessions to young scriptwriters). Sidonie Naulin (Chapter 11) observes that the percentage of high-profile haute cuisine chefs attending international food festivals is stable from one event to the next. These chefs attend the events as a means to further build their reputation. Yet at the start of their career, being invited to give a cooking demonstration on stage plays an important role in securing initial international visibility and credibility. Tatiana Rubtcova (Chapter 4) explains how events can be used to advance in a professional sector. Wedding events range from supporting the wedding planning market (as places where new wedding planners can share their problems and find solutions together) to offering a way out of the business (some of the more seasoned wedding planners become event organizers at a certain point in their career).

Event organizers produce the conditions for these different uses. Events materially highlight innovations, showcase competition, present industry trends and perform the values of the targeted sector in order to attract and retain as many participants as possible over their careers (Potier, Chapter 8). They target both newcomers and established professionals. Newcomers are often students in training, as in the case of the food festivals studied by Sidonie Naulin (Chapter 11) and TV festivals analysed by Anne-Sophie Béliard (Chapter 2). They do not pay for their accreditation, but supply a cheap workforce in return for access to major names in the industry.

The Three Outcomes of Event Participation on Careers: Lack of Impact, Career Boost and Springboard for a Change of Career

It is hard to study a posteriori the career paths of professional event attendees to be able to isolate a specific participation effect. Yet our book does shed light on how events can play a role in professional careers and status. Three different outcomes can be identified, often associated with the event’s target industry, as: lack of impact; career boost; and springboard for a career change.

For some professions and sectors, participating in events appears to have no real effect. First, events may be ‘business as usual’ from certain points of view. For the employers’ representatives studied by Marieke Louis (Chapter 10), professional event attendance and organization are part of their everyday work. Consequently, professional events are not a decisive factor in either career advancement or internationalization. Second, some events fail to retain their participants from one year to the next and therefore remain one-time occurrences in professionals’ careers. Such is the case with Forum Blanc studied by Romain Gandia and Charles-Clemens Rüling (Chapter 5). A signif-
icant number of audiovisual and transmedia actors do not consider it useful to participate in all the editions.

However, events can be game changers and boost the careers of professionals who work in sectors characterized by uncertainty. Such is the case with arthouse cinema operators for whom film festivals are an opportunity to improve their professional status. Olivier Zerbib (Chapter 7) explains that film festivals are negotiating arenas where small exhibitors can manage to change the status of their theatre and secure the most coveted films. Similarly, in the TV series industry, ‘pitch sessions’ give – young – scriptwriters the opportunity to meet producers who can help them by funding their future projects or employing them on current projects (Béliard, Chapter 2). Without radically influencing careers, event attendance and organization can also be instrumental in differentiating the paths of players from the same social world. As Flavie Genatio shows in her Fab City Summit case study (Chapter 3), the relationships forged between makers organizing an event and politicians or institutions – during the making of the event – endure after the event and influence the careers and positions of these organizers in the maker sphere.

In other sectors, mostly emerging and fragile industries, events offer opportunities for a change of career. They can support occupational shifts and new career choices. Such is the case with wedding planners who become professional wedding event organizers or coaches following their participation in wedding events (Rubtcova, Chapter 4).

**Beyond Field-Configuring Events Theory: Three Shades of (Non-) Configuration**

Management and organization studies analyse professional events in terms of ‘field-configuring events’ (Meyer et al., 2005; Lampel and Meyer, 2008). According to Lampel and Meyer,

Field-Configuring Events (FCEs) are temporary social organizations such as trade shows, professional gatherings, technology contests, and business ceremonies that encapsulate and shape the development of professions, technologies, markets, and industries (Meyer et al., 2005). […] FCEs are arenas in which networks are constructed, business cards are exchanged, reputations are advanced, deals are struck, news is shared, accomplishments are recognized, standards are set, and dominant designs are selected. (2008: 1026)

This theoretical framework has been widely used to understand the role of events in configuring markets and industries (Aspers and Darr, 2011). In this book, we nuance this approach in three ways.

First, the configuring role of events is not found only in what happens during events, but also in the relationships forged during the making of the event. The
maker movement studied by Flavie Genatio (Chapter 3) was structured by the bonds forged between different types of actors (mostly makerspace managers and public authorities) while setting up and following the event. In this case study, the regulation and funding of the local maker movement stemmed for the most part from a coalition of players who first met organizing major events.

Second, professional events are sometimes merely a kind of ‘sub-market’ whose function is to build belief in the existence of the industry without configuring it. The primary market for wedding planning is quite limited. Wedding festivals are an opportunity for wedding planners to uphold the image of wedding planning as a new creative occupation with a promising market (Rubtcova, Chapter 4). At events, wedding planners consolidate relationships with other wedding professionals in order to secure future business as event organizers. They also hold training sessions for newcomers to earn extra income. Professional events sustain the representation of the existence of the industry rather than its actual existence.

Finally, events sometimes appear to fail to configure an emerging field. Such is the case with the field of crossmedia and transmedia. In Chapter 5, Romain Gandia and Charles-Clemens Rüling show that Forum Blanc, created in 2010 to support the emergence of the industry, failed to engage with participants. This led to frequent changes of strategic direction and festival target audience until the event’s closure in 2018. The configuring role of professional events is thus more complex and uncertain than usually portrayed by the literature.

From Field-Configuring Events to Profession-Configuring Events

Management and organization studies focus mainly on the role of events in configuring markets and industries. Far less research is available on the role of events in configuring professions. In this book, we show that professional events comprise profession-configuring devices, which can strengthen professional hierarchies and structure emerging professional groups.

There is no dedicated body of literature on the role of professional events in the configuration of professions despite the fact that many authors have noted that trade shows are places where collective identities are built (Gamson, 1996; Aspers and Darr, 2011). Event organizers shape learning and interactions (Dobusch and Schüssler, 2010; Rinallo and Golpetto, 2011) not only for professionals to learn about their competitors and business partners (Maskell, 2014; Sharland and Balogh, 1996), but also for them to integrate into their own professional community. Nyqvist et al. observe that, ‘The conference or trade fair [are places] where industries take shape and identities of professionals are created’ (2017: 1). For them, this is because professional gatherings provide ‘an important opportunity not only for networking and socializing, but also to gain new knowledge, share information with peers and in general learn
the ropes of their respective industry’, (2017: 2). Participants in professional gatherings are integrated into a professional community, develop a collective identity and come to share professional norms by observing, listening to and talking with their peers (Lecler, 2020). In this edited volume, we show how the design of events and certain devices such as conferences and round tables (Gandia and Rüling, Chapter 5) and training sessions (Béliard, Chapter 2; Rubtcova, Chapter 4) constitute means of professional socialization and informal networking. Events make professional communities visible to both themselves and a more general public, as Anne Jourdain shows in the case study of Maison&Objet (Chapter 6). The building of shared narratives from and about the profession appears to be a structural feature of large-scale professional gatherings (Rubtcova, Chapter 4; Gandia and Rüling, Chapter 5).

The configuring role of events can strengthen professional hierarchies. Large-scale professional gatherings and trade shows are often likened to ‘carnival time’ when hierarchies are eradicated: over a cocktail or on the dance floor, the owner of a large corporation appears equal to a newly arrived intern. However, this hierarchical levelling is limited and often deceptive. Most of the time, events are designed to signal and reinforce power relations. Stand location, the badging and accreditation systems, and the hierarchy of stages all operate as signals and reminders of everyone’s position (Potier, Chapter 8). Even at socializing events, nobody seems to forget their position (Béliard, Chapter 2). Some activities are designed specially to strengthen existing hierarchies or create new ones, such as award ceremonies and invitations to deliver a conference (Naulin, Chapter 11). In a mature but dominated profession, such as the film exhibitors studied by Olivier Zerbib in Chapter 7, professional events can provide opportunities to change power relations (with film distributors in this case). Olivier Zerbib shows that large-scale professional gatherings of independent workers play an important but understudied role in pacifying relationships between professions used to working together in a context of power inequalities. It is only in certain circumstances that professional events can reshuffle the cards.

Professional events can also contribute to the emergence of new professions and the reshaping of professions’ boundaries. Anne-Sophie Béliard (Chapter 2) shows that TV festivals are one of the few places where French TV scriptwriters used to working alone can meet each other and try to organize as a profession. Some unions have emerged from encounters at festivals. Festivals enable the dominated group of scriptwriters to try to right the power imbalance with producers through collective organization. The role of events for professions appears to be associated with the nature of the event organizer. In Chapter 6, Anne Jourdain explains that the creation of a craft fair by a craft federation following World War II provided craftspeople with both a marketplace and a place for professional socialization. The growth of the craft show,
changes in the market for arts and crafts and the buyout of half of the trade show by an international trade show organizer in 1995 substantially changed the role and function of the new international interior design show for traditional craft artists. The event was no longer central for them in terms of professional socialization and market. Sometimes, professional events fail to reshape the boundaries of existing professions, such as in the case of the profession of chef. As Sidonie Naulin shows in Chapter 11, the creation and proliferation of international food festivals have not led to the formation of an international professional community of chefs. Each festival has its own definition of the international food scene, and its function is rather to consolidate national professional communities than to shape a transnational professional community.

Crafting Sociability to Strengthen Professions and Careers

Whether in reference to ‘collective effervescence’ (Jourdain, Chapter 6), ‘conviviality’ (Potier, Chapter 8) or ‘festive sociability’ (Béliard, Chapter 2), all the chapters point up the importance of entertainment and parties during events. A number of studies have shown the ‘networking’ and ‘catching up’ role of these moments that take place in specific locations – ‘restaurants, bars and dance floors after hours and outside of the actual meeting space’ (Aspers and Darr, 2011: 770; Nyqvist, 2015; Power and Jansson, 2008). Several chapters expand on this, exploring the different functions of this festive dimension in terms of careers and structuring professions.

Sociability is a way to get participants in professional events to – ostensibly – put on hold the professional motives for their participation and smooth their professional relationships (Zerbib, Chapter 7). Producing sociability is a key mission for event organizers (Potier, Chapter 8). Many devices are set up to generate encounters: the spatial arrangement of the stands, orientation of attendee circulation, signalling of participant status, the temporal organization of the days, social events within and around the main event, free drinks and so on. Encounters that appear to be the product of serendipity are actually carefully crafted by the organizers. The event organizer’s identity and level of professionalism (from trade representative to highly skilled staff within large event organizers) influence the type of sociability provided by the event, ranging from the fairly informal to the highly formal (Jourdain, Chapter 6). Most of the time, sociability is highly ambiguous: personal relationships are embedded in professional relationships. This can lead to misunderstandings and disappointments: distasteful reminders of subordinate status, short-lived relationships, unreciprocated efforts to socialize and so on (Béliard, Chapter 2). Even this apparently spontaneous side of the event calls for a form of socialization into professional norms of behaviour in formal and ostensibly informal settings.
Event sociabilities serve a number of purposes for professions and professionals. First, sociability at market events is about finding potential partners and doing business in a casual environment (Rubtcova, Chapter 4; Potier, Chapter 8). This observation bears out the findings of previous research that ‘informal talk and gossip over food and drink’ play an important role in commercial relations (Høyer Leivestad and Nyqvist, 2017: 10). Second, event sociability is a means of creating, maintaining and increasing social capital (Béliard, Chapter 2). Third, festivities can also be a way to strengthen existing ties and to build or consolidate professional communities on a national or international scale (Naulin, Chapter 11). Anne Jourdain (Chapter 6) shows that the collective effervescence of the Maison&Objet fair originally strengthened the professional community of craft artists by reaffirming and performing their values. The subsequent disappearance of this collective effervescence went hand in hand with the diversification of attendees and the destabilization of the professional community of craft artists. Anne-Sophie Béliard (Chapter 2) explains how TV scriptwriters meet and become friends with other scriptwriters who share their view of the profession and with whom they try to build the profession’s legitimacy.

Sociability is probably the one aspect of events the hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. By not being able to catch up with old colleagues and to make new meetings, professionals lose an important motive to participate in professional events.

PARTS AND CHAPTERS

Analysis of the role of professional events in careers and professions varies depending on the occupational community’s particular agenda. Three agendas are defined here: the emergence of an occupational community, its perpetuation and its transnationalization.

The Emergence of an Occupational Community

The first part of the book analyses the role of professional events in structuring and stabilizing emerging sectors. It covers four case studies: TV series, the maker movement, wedding planning and the transmedia industry. Professional events play a crucial role for emerging industries. Self-introduction, networking, socialization and professional training are all key to building a common identity. Professionals attend different events depending on their business segment and career status. In turn, the trajectories of the events themselves are predicated on the institutionalization of the emerging sectors that they cover.

In Chapter 2, ‘Festival sociability and professional careers: the role of TV festivals in structuring the series scriptwriting profession’, Anne-Sophie
Béliard reports on an ethnographic study of TV festivals. The author explains how the different forms of sociability developed at festivals affect the relationships between TV series producers, broadcasters and scriptwriters. The promise of informal interactions at festive events is jeopardized by the symbolic perpetuation of professional hierarchies, and social capital remains the key factor for TV scriptwriters to meet producers and distributors. Alcohol is not enough to challenge the power relations in place the rest of the year. To overcome these difficulties, festivals set up formal matching devices that give young scriptwriters the possibility to meet and work with seasoned professionals, producers in particular. Festivals become places for training and professional socialization. In terms of this function, festivals are used differently depending on the stage at which participants are in their career. Finally, the festive dimension of festivals is conducive to encounters within a professional group rather than between professional groups. In this way, festivals contribute to building the identity of this professional group and to reinforcing the strong bonds that already exist between scriptwriters.

In Chapter 3, ‘Fab City Summit: structuring makerspace collectives around event preparations’, Flavie Genatio studies the role of events in structuring the maker movement. The chapter draws on ethnographic observations, interviews and archives to track the bidding for preparation, staging and upshots of the Fab City Summit event in Paris in July 2018. It analyses how the process of preparing and holding maker events builds relationships between makerspace actors but also – and more significantly – between makerspace actors who organize the events and institutional actors. The author demonstrates the importance of international structures and labels to the holding of events. They are both ‘boundary objects’ that facilitate negotiations and collaboration between actors with different interests. Flavie Genatio points up an original result compared with the literature on field-configuring events: it is not so much the event itself that structures the sector as everything that happens before and after the event. At local level, the ‘maker communities’ are structured by their work relations and their collective commitment to a project (event organization) where risks are shared. Engagement with public and private partners gives makerspace actors the wherewithal to assert their interests, obtain financing and forge relationships of trust with external partners that can be reactivated in other circumstances after the event.

In Chapter 4, ‘Wedding business events: career tool and emerging market sustainability solution’, Tatiana Rubtcova analyses the participation of wedding planners in wedding business events. The author points out a paradox: despite the difficulties of making a living from wedding planning (almost a non-business market with very low demand), wedding planners are deeply committed to the wedding events industry. Analysing professional and semi-professional events, Tatiana Rubtcova shows that events are instrumental
in perpetuating the wedding services market. Participation in events helps wedding planners to carry on with their activity and uphold the belief in the market’s existence. Business events serve not only as networking, skills training and selective matching devices, but also as resource redistribution devices enabling certain actors to move into or remain in high-profit market segments. Professional wedding events, like other events studied in this book (see Chapter 6 by Anne Jourdain, Chapter 2 by Anne-Sophie Béliard and Chapter 8 by Victor Potier), are moments of festivity, conviviality and effervescence. More importantly, they are instrumental in building wedding planners’ professional identity by creating a collective narrative of the profession. Events help wedding planners to stay in the business despite its difficulties, but they also play a key role in their career development. The author shows that some wedding planners leave the business to become event organizers or coaches. Here, she produces a complementary finding to Flavie Genatio regarding the logic of event organization: events can support career moves.

In Chapter 5, ‘Failing to configure? The life and death of Forum Blanc’, Romain Gandia and Charles-Clemens Rüling present a longitudinal analysis of Forum Blanc, the only transmedia event ever held in France. The event was launched in 2009 and shelved in 2018. In this case study, the authors develop original insight into the ‘field-configuring’ role of events. Unlike other research, which highlights the role of recurrent events in shaping emerging organizational fields, the authors show how events can fail to configure emergent fields. They study field-configuration failure by means of an analysis of Forum Blanc’s life course. Over nine editions, the event tried in vain to unite players around crossmedia and transmedia issues and engage them in developing new forms of creation. The authors highlight the event’s inability to build a stable understanding of the transmedia phenomenon, establish a clear identity to support field configuration and configure a stable and loyal core community. An analysis of event participation reveals that Forum Blanc failed to build a stable base of players repeatedly interacting at the event over time. Analysis of the event’s narratives explores the emergence of stable event-related concepts and understandings, and demonstrates the limitations of the event’s cognitive structuring role. Disproportionate opening up of social and symbolic boundaries over the course of the forum’s editions prompted withdrawal by early audiences and sharp swings in narrative.

The Perpetuation of an Occupational Community

The second part of the book analyses how professional events shape professional communities in the case of mature economic sectors. It comprises three case studies: craft artists (interior design trade show), cinema exhibitors (film festivals) and event organizers themselves. In these industries, professional
Trade shows in the 21st century are places for mutual observation, reaffirmation of a common identity and conflict resolution. The venue’s physical layout frames the interactions and reflects the way power is distributed, competition organized and conviviality produced. The friendly atmosphere of events is not only a way to downplay the economic transaction aspect, but it also strengthens a business community and secures the careers of its members. The role of professional events in configuring occupational communities in mature sectors depends on the identity of the organizers and their matching skills.

In Chapter 6, ‘From small craft fair to international interior design trade show: how Maison&Objet structured fine crafts in France (1949–2021)’, Anne Jourdain focuses on the link between trade show morphology and the organizer’s identity. Drawing on a wealth of archive material on what is one of the largest international interior design trade shows today, she documents the history of a trade show by presenting how a small craft exhibition organized by a professional union became a major international trade show organized by a business event industry leader. Larger, more industrial companies gradually marginalized the original craft exhibitors who had used the exhibition to build their professional community. Anne Jourdain asks whether the dissociation of the trade show from the trade federation caused the professional group of craft artists to unravel.

In Chapter 7, ‘Place your bets, all bets are off! Film festivals as devices for the construction and management of uncertainty for distributors and arthouse cinemas’, Olivier Zerbib explores a rarely studied profession in the well-known business of film distribution: cinema operators and their working relations with distributors. Although cinema operators and distributors share the same passion for cinema, power and control underlie their business transactions. Contrary to popular belief that ‘all bets are off’ between these players as soon as the films are produced, Olivier Zerbib shows that film festivals are a real game changer. They play a crucial role in changing working relations in the cinema industry at two levels. First, film festivals bring uncertainty into a business world of certainty by giving cinema operators the opportunity to change their cinema’s status: festivals are places for negotiations where small exhibitors can succeed in securing the most coveted films. Secondly, film festivals are essential to restore and maintain the level of trust and cordiality required for business relations between professionals who need to be able to work together despite the conflictual nature of their relations the rest of the year.

In Chapter 8, ‘“Not working … networking!” Scripting and shaping conviviality in trade events’, Victor Potier studies how trade event organizers manufacture conviviality among event participants. The apparently random nature of encounters at events is actually planned and prepared by organizers to improve the quality and quantity of participant matching. Taking an ethno-
graphic approach (observations and interviews) and quantitative data on businesses in the event organization sector, Victor Potier proposes a sociotechnical study of event organization as the production of conviviality. He analyses the organizers’ supply of conviviality by considering it as a script which he calls a ‘conviviality scenario’. Conviviality scenarios are designed to represent target audiences (professional sectors or markets) as ‘communities’. They are proposed to participants by means of staging in the form of a credible, intelligible representation of their sector. The convivial gathering is an event product that calls for its designers to have constantly updated in-depth knowledge of the users for whom their device is designed.

The Transnationalization of a Professional Community

The third part of the book analyses the role of professional events for transnational professional communities and professional groups seeking to become transnational. It covers three case studies: the rise of international trade fairs in France in the 1960s, international business summits and international food festivals. The internationalization of professional events opens up new markets for professionals and extends their reach. However, the potential for both internationalization and its success is highly dependent on domestic grounding and will. In some cases, the internationalization of events is merely an excuse to gain local influence.

In Chapter 9, ‘International trade before globalization: the invention of international trade shows in France in the 1960s’, Romain Lecler presents the entrepreneurial work of an organization built by trade associations in the 1960s in order to promote French industry abroad. The development of international trade shows was a way to improve domestic industry access to international markets. Drawing on archival material from Promosalons, he shows that the joint interests of the French administration and trade associations drove the development of international trade shows as marketing tools. Growing competition between trade shows led to the creation of an industry central to global trade, well before economic globalization in the 1980s.

In Chapter 10, ‘B8, B7 and B20 summits as professional events: business as usual or new opportunities for business organizations?’, Marieke Louis draws on press material and interviews to understand the significance of international business summits to business organizations. Unlike many international trade shows, international business summits are non-market events with a long history, although the Business 8, Business 7 and Business 20 summits emerged in the 2000s and only concern rich countries. Participation in such events is part of the routine work of employers’ representatives, especially business federation staff in charge of international affairs. Why do employers’ representatives and business federations need to meet at this particular international
level? Marieke Louis explains the very existence of these events by their dependence on intergovernmental meetings. International business summits are not significant game changers for the parties involved, but can still be a way to gain visibility and influence governments. The chapter shows that these events are profoundly fragmented, lack autonomy and that their concrete outcomes remain uncertain, for both the business community at large and the individual careers of the organizers and participants.

In Chapter 11, ‘The role of professional gatherings in the globalization of a professional space: the example of international food festivals’, Sidonie Naulin examines how professional events fail to configure an international professional chef community. Drawing on a quantitative analysis of the programmes of five international food festivals held in Europe and ethnographic observation data on ten festivals, she shows that the many international food festivals that have developed since the 1990s convene different segments of the chef profession’s elite, mostly from the host country. They do not manage to embody an international professional community in such a performative way as other devices like rankings and restaurant guides. Finally, it appears that international food festivals are more tools for national chef communities to gather together than instruments for the globalization of the profession.

The concluding chapter ‘Afterword: Covid-19 and the digital quarantine of event-based sociabilities’ (Potier, Chapter 12) analyses the issues that Covid-19 has raised. The Covid-19 crisis started during our research, impacting on both the events industry and our survey. The pandemic has shut down a significant portion of event activities or prompted their digitization. However, only a minority of events managed to take place online in the first year of the pandemic. This difficult digitization is indicative of inequalities in innovative capacities in the events industry. Companies with the means to outsource the onlining of their events to external service providers (managing videoconference links and invitations, website creation, mailings and so on) stand out from the most vulnerable companies forced to cancel their events due to their lack of capital and visibility. For the participants, digitization loses in conviviality, but gains in commercial effectiveness.

NOTES

1. The authors contributed equally to this study and share primary authorship.
2. As Romain Lecler explains in his chapter: in France, ‘Fairs are annual commercial events whose purpose is to place samples of different goods on public display in order to publicize their qualities and encourage their purchase’, and ‘trade shows are fairs that are dedicated more specifically to a given category of goods’. (Ordinance No. 45-2088 of the Provisional Government of the French Republic, 11 September 1945). Trade shows showcase new products and ser-
services on the market, especially in the art field. They do not entail the systematic buying or selling of these products or services.

REFERENCES


