Cross Innovation Talk & Match Making

Curated talks and targeted matchmaking to spark cross-sector collaboration

Blueprint:
Living Labs and future spaces

Region:
Upper Austria (AT31)

Duration:
Half-day: ~4 hours

Size:
Large: 31-60 persons

Budget:
Small: below 2,000 €

Mode:
Physical/offline

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OVERVIEW

What has been done

Creative Region Linz & Upper Austria organised a flagship event bringing together creative professionals and companies to showcase real collaboration projects and their transformational impact. Under the title "Creativity & Design as Success Factors for Business", the evening featured three live talks in which creative duos – each consisting of a creative professional and their business partner – presented concrete projects, honest processes and shared learnings. A structured pre-event matchmaking session paired participants according to their projects, challenges and interests, enabling targeted new connections before the talks began.

Why was it needed locally

In the Salzkammergut region, low-barrier spaces for cross-sector exchange between creative professionals and traditional businesses are rare. While Upper Austria has a strong manufacturing base and a growing creative sector, structured opportunities for the two to meet, exchange and collaborate are largely absent outside of urban centres like Linz. SMEs in the region rarely have access to real-world examples of creative collaboration – making visible, story-driven formats like this one particularly valuable locally.

Target Groups: How were they activated and their benefits

Chambers of commerce – WKO Oberösterreich / WKO Gmunden

Activation

- Co-organisation and venue provision by WKO Gmunden
- Joint communication to WKO member networks
- Pre-event matchmaking survey sent to all registrants

WKO Gmunden co-hosted the event and contributed their venue, local network and communication channels. A pre-event survey was sent to all registered participants to enable curated matchmaking, activating attendees before they even arrived.

The Chamber of Commerce gained a high-quality, low-barrier event format that made the value of creative collaboration tangible for their SME members. The co-organisation strengthened the Chamber's positioning as a space for innovation and cross-sector exchange.

Creative SME – Regional SMEs, product designers, branding studios, architects, manufacturers

Activation

- Pre-event survey to collect project profiles and collaboration interests

- Curated table assignments based on survey responses (lake-named tables)
- Structured matchmaking session (45 min) before the talks
- Open networking session after the talks with snacks and drinks

Participants were recruited via Creative Region's community channels and the WKO network. All registrants received a pre-event survey on their projects and interests. On the evening, they were seated at curated tables, named after Salzkammergut lakes, composed to maximise complementarity and spark meaningful conversations before the talks.

Companies gained concrete inspiration and direct contact with creative professionals suited to their challenges. Creative professionals gained visibility, new potential clients and collaboration partners. Both sides benefited from the structured matchmaking format that moved beyond casual networking.

Industrial / technological SME – Manufacturing and technology companies from the Salzkammergut region and Upper Austria (e.g. production, engineering, product development)

Activation

- Outreach via WKO Gmunden member network & personal invitation by Creative Region
- Pre-event survey to capture current challenges and innovation needs
- Curated matchmaking pairing SMEs directly with relevant creative professionals
- Live tandem talks showcasing concrete product and process outcomes of creative collaboration

Reached through Creative Region and WKO Gmunden network and personal outreach. The pre-event matchmaking survey ensured they arrived with a clear profile and were paired with creative professionals suited to their current challenges – turning the evening into a practical first step rather than passive inspiration.

SMEs gained direct access to creative professionals and concrete examples of how design thinking and creative collaboration can drive product innovation, process improvement and new business models. The event lowered the barrier to starting a first creative collaboration by making the value tangible through real-world stories.

Resources Required

Staff
Event moderation, community management, speaker curation, content production, matchmaking facilitation

Space
WKO Gmunden - main hall with seating for ~60 participants, suitable for talks and table-based networking

Equipment
Presentation technology (projector/screen), microphones, name tags, printed table assignments,

catering setup for snacks and drinks

Budget

Small: below 2,000 €

main costs covered by project budget (staff time, communication materials, catering). Venue provided by WKO Gmunden at no cost. No speaker fees.

METHODS & STEPS

Core Mechanism

Core Concept: This action used storytelling and curated peer exchange as a method to make the value of creative collaboration visible and tangible. Rather than presenting theory, real creative-business duos shared honest accounts of their joint projects, including challenges and turning points. A structured matchmaking session before the talks ensured that inspiration translated into concrete new connections.

Formats applied

Conference

A moderated evening event featuring three live talks by creative-business tandems, each presenting a real collaboration project. The format combined keynote-style storytelling with open Q&A and audience interaction.

Methods used:

Tandem Talk: Two people, one creative professional, one business partner, present a shared project together from both perspectives, including honest reflection on process, challenges and turning points.

Moderated Q&A: The moderator guided each tandem through key questions focused on soft skills, trust-building and collaboration dynamics, opening the floor to audience questions afterwards.

Matchmaking event

A structured pre-event matchmaking session paired participants based on a pre-filled survey about their current projects, challenges and interests. Curated table groups (named after Salzkammergut lakes) facilitated targeted first conversations before the talks began.

Methods used:

Pre-event profiling survey: All registrants filled in a short questionnaire about their current projects and collaboration interests, providing the basis for curated group assignments.

Curated table matchmaking: Participants were seated at pre-assigned tables (named after Salzkammergut lakes) composed to maximise complementarit, turning a networking session into a structured exchange with purpose.

Network / platform

Post-event communication, including a website article and social media content, documented the outcomes and extended the reach of the format beyond the evening itself.

Methods used:

Editorial storytelling: A long-form article on creativeregion.org captured the three projects, key learnings and the soft skills that made each collaboration work, written for a regional creative and business audience.

Social media amplification: A LinkedIn post summarised the evening, tagged all speakers and partners, and made the outcomes visible within the broader x-Inno Radar network.

Steps taken

1. **Speaker Selection & Curation (October 2025 - May 2026)**
   - **Identification of creative tandems** — Three real creative-business partnerships were selected based on project quality, diversity of sector and willingness to share openly
   - **Speaker briefing** — Each tandem received a briefing on format, focus (soft skills, process, turning points) and expected level of openness
   - **Content preparation** — Speakers prepared short presentations; moderator developed guiding questions for each tandem
2. **Participant Recruitment & Matchmaking Preparation (April - May 2026)**
   - **Event promotion** — Outreach via Creative Region channels, WKO Gmunden network and targeted personal invitations
   - **Pre-event survey** — All registrants received a survey asking about their projects, challenges and collaboration interests
   - **Curated table assignment** — Participants were grouped into complementary table groups based on survey responses, named after local Salzkammergut lakes
3. **Flagship Event (May 2026)**
   - **Structured matchmaking session** — 45-minute curated networking at pre-assigned tables before the talks began
   - **Creative Collab Talks** — Three moderated tandem talks presenting real projects, processes

and learnings (approx. 90 min)

- **Open networking** — Informal networking with snacks and drinks following the talks

4. **Post-Event Communication** **(May 2026)**

   - **Website article** — Long-form article published on creativeregion.org documenting the three projects and key learnings
   - **Social media** — LinkedIn post summarising the evening and tagging all partners and speakers

RESULTS

Measurable and Direct Outcomes

• **New / enhanced cooperation** — The event directly connected creative professionals and SMEs who had not previously worked together. The curated matchmaking format, based on pre-event profiling, moved beyond casual networking and created a foundation for concrete follow-up collaborations. Several participants expressed intent to explore joint projects after the evening.

• **Stakeholder awareness / network extensions** — Participants from design, branding, manufacturing and business support gained visibility into how cross-sector creative collaboration works in practice. The three tandem talks made soft skills, trust, adaptability, communication on eye level, tangible and transferable, raising awareness of their role as genuine innovation drivers.

• **Follow-up projects** — The post-event article on creativeregion.org and social media communication extended the reach of the format and its documented best practices beyond the evening itself, contributing to a growing regional reference base for creative–business collaboration.

Indirect Impacts

The event established a replicable format for making creative collaboration visible in regional business contexts, demonstrating that cross-sector exchange can be organised in a low-barrier, high-quality way outside of urban centres. Beyond the event itself, it contributes to a gradual shift in how businesses and support organisations perceive the creative sector, from aesthetic service provider to strategic innovation partner.

Local Outlook / Follow-up

- **Format repetition** — Creative Region plans to re-offer the Creative Collab Talk format as a recurring element of its regional programme, potentially in other municipalities across Upper Austria, building on the proven combination of tandem storytelling and curated matchmaking.
- **Integration into x-Inno knowledge base** — The documented best practices from the three tandem projects will be shared as reference cases within the x-Inno Radar transnational network, contributing to the broader pool of soft skill visibility approaches across partner regions.

EVALUATION

Satisfaction - Overview

Participant feedback, gathered informally on the evening and beyond, was consistently positive. The format was perceived as filling a real gap in the regional offering, with several attendees noting that structured cross-sector exchange of this kind had been missing in the area. The honest, story-driven talks were described as inspiring and largely unknown to the audience, while the soft skills and challenges presented resonated strongly with participants' own professional experiences.

Satisfaction - Details

- **New connections in close proximity** — Participants were surprised to discover how many relevant people like designers, manufacturers, business owners , were operating in the same region without having met before. The curated matchmaking was highlighted as the key mechanism that made these connections happen.
- **Relevance & inspiration** — The three tandem projects were largely unknown to the audience yet immediately relatable. Participants recognised the collaboration challenges and soft skills described, trust, eye-level communication, adaptability, as directly relevant to their own work contexts.
- **Format & moderation** — The evening was praised for its quality of moderation and the balance between structured content and open exchange. Multiple participants expressed a clear wish for the format to be repeated and noted that Creative Region's network was a key reason the right people were in the room.

TRANSFER HINTS

DO: Copy us

- **Use real tandems, not solo speakers** — Always present creative–business pairs together, from both perspectives. The dual voice between client and creative in the same conversation is what makes the format credible and the soft skills visible. One side alone tells only half the story.
- **Invest in pre-event matchmaking** — A short profiling survey before the event transforms networking from random to intentional. The effort is low; the impact on connection quality is high. Curated seating or table groups are a simple but effective tool to make this tangible on the evening.
- **Keep it local and specific** — Real projects from the region, presented by people in the room, create immediate resonance. Avoid abstract case studies or imported examples, participants connect most when they recognise the context.

OPTIONS: Feel flexible

- **Scale the format** — The core - tandem talks & matchmaking - works for 30 or 150 people, in a chamber of commerce, a creative hub or a cultural venue. Venue character and size can be adapted freely without losing the concept.
- **Adapt the sector focus** — The format works beyond creative–business collaboration. Any context where two different professional cultures need to understand each other's value can use the same structure, e.g. tech & social innovation, craft & digital, research & practice.

Don't: Pitfalls to avoid

- **Don't skip the pre-event survey** — Without profiling participants in advance, matchmaking becomes generic networking. The survey is what allows curated groupings. Removing it reduces the format to a standard evening event.
- **Don't select speakers for polish** — Tandems should be chosen for honesty, not for having a perfect success story. If the projects presented feel too smooth, participants disengage. Friction, detours and open challenges are what make talks credible and relatable.
- **Don't overload the programme** — The combination of structured matchmaking and three talks is already a full evening. Resist the temptation to add more content – the open networking time at the end is where a significant part of the value is created.

PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIALS & IMPRESSIONS

Testimonials

> ""*Thank you for this wonderfully crafted and inspiring event, full of stimulating conversations and valuable encounters. It was particularly great to see how much potential lies in the collaboration between creative professionals and businesses.*" "

— **Gabriele B.** , Participant , Gmunden

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Impressions

Hanna Burgstaller / Creative Region Linz & Upper Austria

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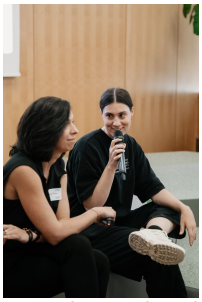

Hanna Burgstaller / Creative Region Linz & Upper Austria

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REPLICATE THIS APPLICATION?

Contact: Wolfgang Gumpelmaier-Mach
Email: wolfgang@creativeregion.org

Part of Blueprint: **Living Labs and future spaces**

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