International Trade Fairs and Global Buzz, Part II: Practices of Global Buzz

Nina Schuldt & Harald Bathelt

Version Post-print/accepted manuscript

Citation Schuldt, N., & Bathelt, H. (2011). International trade fairs and global
(published version) buzz. Part II: Practices of global buzz. *European Planning Studies*, 19(1), 1-22.

Copyright / License

Publisher's Statement This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *European Planning Studies* on Jan 2011, available online:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/09654313.2011.530390>.

How to cite TSpace items

Always cite the published version, so the author(s) will receive recognition through services that track citation counts, e.g. Scopus. If you need to cite the page number of the TSpace version (original manuscript or accepted manuscript) because you cannot access the published version, then cite the TSpace version **in addition to** the published version using the permanent URI (handle) found on the record page.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
LIBRARIES

June 16, 2010

ca 10,400 words (text and references)

International trade fairs and global buzz,

Part II: practices of global buzz

Nina Schuldt

Faculty of Geography, University of Marburg,
Deutschhausstraße 10, D-35032 Marburg, Germany,
E-mail: nina.schuldt@web.de

and

Harald Bathelt

University of Toronto, Department of Political Science and
Department of Geography & Program in Planning,
Sidney Smith Hall, 100 St. George Street, Toronto ON M5S 3G3, Canada,
E-mail: harald.bathelt@utoronto.ca, URL: <http://www.harald-bathelt.com>

Paper to be re-submitted to
European Planning Studies

International trade fairs and global buzz, Part II: practices of global buzz

Abstract (ca. 200 words): International trade fairs bring together agents from all over the world for a limited time period. They create a dense ecology of communication and information flows, referred to as “global buzz”. Global buzz associated with face-to-face (F2F) communication is extremely important for agents participating in these events as it generates access to developments occurring in different parts of the world. It helps to maintain and intensify existing networks, establish new networks or “trans-local pipelines”, and support the development of shared attitudes and understandings. This paper aims to provide empirical evidence about the significance of global buzz in its manifold forms. Our research emphasizes the benefits that result from four sets of closely interrelated practices: (i) global knowledge exchange based on F2F interaction, (ii) exploration of market trends, (iii) problem solving and idea generation and (iv) network generation and pipeline-building in interpretative communities. The paper argues that practices of acquiring information, networking and dealing with competition differ substantially according to industry, firm and product characteristics. Our analysis of global buzz practices draws from 460 semi-structured interviews, which were conducted between 2004 and 2006 at seven national and international trade fairs in Frankfurt/Main, Hannover and Nürnberg, Germany.

Keywords: Global buzz; International trade fairs; Face-to-face contact; Communication and interaction practices

JEL Classifications: D83, F59, M39, O33, Z13

1. Introduction

With respect to knowledge flows in the contemporary economy, one is tempted to say: “Everything buzzes, vibrates, hums and rustles” – referring to the overflow of information which people are faced with in their everyday life. Especially in the Internet age, an overflow of information can provide problems as individuals have to solve the task of distinguishing important from less important information, combining the different bits and pieces acquired from various sources, and making sense of all this by creating cognitive microcosms of representations and explanations of this reality. The capability to order this mass of information and apply it successfully to a specific context is not a simple routine. It evolves from experience and through learning processes over time.

In economic context, firms are faced with an increasingly complex reality. On the one hand, firms use new information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly the Internet, to acquire information about distant markets and new product developments to advertise and market their own products to new customers (e.g. Deeter-Schmelz and Kennedy 2002). Moreover, they rely on computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as the use of video-conferencing, to organize production and innovation processes between different locations of their corporate networks (Moriset and Malecki 2009). On the other hand, traditional forms of getting together and making business with one another, based on face-to-face (F2F) interaction and co-location, are seemingly still key. F2F communication is particularly important when making non-routine business decisions, solving complex problems and establishing new network relations with firms in other regions and countries (e.g. Hildreth, Kimble and Wright 2000; Gallié and Guichard 2002; Wickham and Vecchi 2008).

In this context, major international trade fairs play a significant role because they bring together agents from all over the world for a limited time period and enable processes of knowledge circulation regarding the global state of an entire industry or technology (Rosson and Seringhaus 1995; Borghini, Golfetto and Rinallo 2004). We suggest that these events can be viewed as temporary clusters (Maskell, Bathelt and Malmberg 2006) which create a dense ecology of communication and information flows, referred to as “global buzz” in Part I of this article series (Bathelt and Schuldt 2008a; 2008b). In drawing on the different components of global buzz, Part II argues that international trade fairs connect the globalizing knowledge economy in a way that supports the establishment of networks of production and innovation (“pipelines”) which do not necessarily require permanent co-location.

This paper aims to provide empirical evidence about the practices and significance of global buzz in its manifold forms. As part of this, we intend to show that international trade fairs are characterized by different types of information and communication ecologies. More precisely, our research aims to demonstrate that practices of acquiring information, networking and dealing with competitors during international trade fairs differ substantially according to industry, firm and product characteristics. Using the classification of global buzz components developed in Part I, our research shows that benefits of global buzz particularly result from four sets of closely interrelated practices: (i) global knowledge exchange based on F2F interaction, (ii) exploration of market trends, (iii) problem solving and idea generation, and (iv) network generation and pipeline-building in focused communities. The questions we wish to address are as follows: How are global buzz practices during international trade fairs structured, and which variables affect the different practices? Further: why are trade fairs such unique events in generating opportunities to make contacts, and connect businesses at a global scale? We analyze these questions in a qualitative, explorative study that presents, for the first time, systematic empirical

evidence of the communication and knowledge circulation processes during international trade fairs.

Our argument is structured as follows: In the next section, we provide an analytical framework by exploring influences on the architecture of global buzz. Section 3 gives a brief overview of the study context and methodology by describing where, why and how interviews were conducted with trade fair exhibitors. Section 4 presents empirical results about the practices of global buzz. This section investigates how these practices are shaped by contextual variables, and how they differ accordingly. Finally, section 5 draws some conclusions regarding the consequences of temporary F2F interaction and global buzz practices.

2. The architecture of global buzz

A specific setting through which global knowledge and information are circulated and new linkages explored exists at leading international trade fairs (Borghini, Golfetto and Rinallo 2004; Maskell, Bathelt and Malmberg 2006). These events open up many possibilities for knowledge creation, and network and market development at a global basis. They are characterized by a specific information and communication ecology, referred to as global buzz. Similar to local buzz (Storper and Venables 2004; Bathelt, Malmberg and Maskell 2004), global buzz is a multidimensional concept, made up of different components which enable unique processes of knowledge dissemination and creation through interactive learning and learning by observation (see Part I). It can be described in terms of five constitutive and interrelated components: (i) dedicated co-presence, (ii) intensive F2F interaction, (iii) manifold possibilities for observation, (iv) intersecting interpretative communities, and (v) multiplex meetings and relationships (Schuldt and Bathelt 2009).

International trade fairs bring together leading as well as less well-known agents from an entire value chain or technology platform for the primary purpose of exchanging knowledge regarding the present and future development of their industry, centered around displays of products, prototypes and innovations. Due to a multitude of informal and formal meetings with different participants, representatives of firms enormously benefit from opportunities to scrutinize the exhibits of other firms and inspect the visualizations of their strategies (Bathelt and Schuldt 2008a). F2F meetings with participants at these fairs enable firms to systematically acquire and filter information and knowledge about competitors, suppliers, customers and their technological and strategic choices (e.g. Borghini, Golfetto and Rinallo 2006). Temporary F2F contacts at trade fairs provide a sufficient basis to reassure ongoing interaction, even involving complex communication. Agents at these events benefit from integrational and informational cues (Short, Williams and Christie 1976) transported through repeated, intensive, often short F2F encounters associated with global buzz. During international trade fairs, focused communities with shared technical traditions and educational backgrounds come together. Participation in the discussions that take place helps firms reduce uncertainties and the degree of complexity in fast changing product and technology markets.

Overall, the benefits of global buzz result from a unique set of practices related to global knowledge exchange. This is based on F2F interaction, the exploration of market trends and an abundance of possibilities of inspecting or feeling exhibits, different types of learning processes and potentials for problem solving and idea generation. However, global buzz is not the same at each international trade fair, or in each industry or value chain. It unfolds in different practices and varies according to the purpose and business context of a trade fair. We argue in this paper that communication and knowledge exchange practices are generally influenced by four sets of characteristics: substantive, structural, media-communication and functional characteristics,

depending on which type of information is exchanged, and where, when, why and how this exchange takes place.

(i) *Substantive characteristics.* At a substantive level of communication, different categories of buzz can be distinguished depending on what type of information is exchanged in an economic activity.¹ This can involve information about trends in markets, cross-over technologies or designs. The transfer of information and knowledge involves different degrees of complexity and cognition. It can involve in-depth discussions of strategic information, or simply be an exchange of data. In general, at the substantive level, buzz consists of news, strategic information, experience, rumors, recommendations, pure data and speculations about an industry or firm.

(ii) *Structural characteristics.* These features relate to the questions of where and when communication or observation takes place and which agents are involved. Information travels back and forth through various channels that provide multiple feedbacks to participating agents. The structural level defines the framing conditions for the exchange with other groups of agents (Goffman 1969). The nature of knowledge flows depends on the competence, experience and status of the agents involved, whether they meet during or after trade-fair hours and whether meetings take place at their exhibits, in a café or restaurant. Further, information flows are also shaped by the number of parties involved. Conversations between the representatives of two firms are more focused and intimate than large group discussions. In this respect, it is important

¹ A basic distinction can be made between industry-related and private contents. Although we are primarily interested in the professional context of inter-firm interaction, private conversations can be of interest insofar as they may help to evaluate the trustworthiness of other agents or reconfirm existing business relations.

to differentiate the different positions various people hold in their firms, and the different positions firms have in their respective value chains. This can result in various constellations of horizontal or vertical information exchange (Maskell, Bathelt and Malmberg 2006).

(iii) *Communication-media characteristics.* These characteristics specify the different ways how information and knowledge are transmitted. One important aspect that impacts the type of buzz is related to the media of communication (e.g. Schmitz 2004; Dürscheid 2005). A basic distinction can be made, on the one hand, between a distinctive media of communication such as a printed report, telephone or the Internet, through which information can be acquired from spatially distant partners, and, on the other hand, F2F contact without technical media support (e.g. Gallié and Guichard 2002; Walther, Loh and Granka 2005). Of course, F2F contact can have different implications for the quality and complexity of buzz depending on the symbols, language, facial expressions and gestures involved. Further, a distinction can be made between information exchange involving a quasi-linear sequence of messages and a synchronized, reflexive exchange (Döring 1999). In the context of a trade fair, communication-media characteristics primarily take the form of F2F contacts related to the nature of these events.

(iv) *Functional characteristics.* These characteristics emphasize the goals of communication and focus on the question of why an exchange or observation takes place. In general, goal-oriented and/or intentional discussions can be distinguished from indirect, less-dedicated forms of interaction. While strictly focused discussions between trade fair exhibitors and visitors might ignore important side information about new technological options, less-focused exchange might result in new unexpected insights concerning market trends. Indirect forms of communication also include socio-institutional components, which might exist in the form of joint attitudes or visions. Similar to untraded interdependencies (Storper 1997), such hidden functional components (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson 2000) likely support the

communication process, generate initial personal trust and enable people “to read between the lines”.

Global buzz practices help access new strategic information about market and technology trends in different ways, and they are also very important for branding and finding new suitable business partners (Goehrmann 1992; Prüser 2003; Schuldt and Bathelt 2009). Empirical evidence which systematically analyzes the specifics of the information and communication ecology and the different practices in a systematic way is still limited (e.g. Borghini, Golfetto and Rinallo 2006; Entwistle and Rocamora 2006; Bathelt and Schuldt 2008a), or led by anecdotal evidence (e.g. Maskell, Bathelt and Malmberg 2006; Ramírez-Pasillas 2008). In this paper, we primarily focus on studying the substantive and structural levels of interaction at international trade fairs to explore the major characteristics of communication and interaction processes during these events, and identify variables which help explain their variation. The communication-media and functional characteristics were not focus for a number of reasons: First, communication-media aspects were not as important in our context because the standard form of communication and knowledge exchange at trade fairs is characterized by direct F2F endeavors. Therefore, this aspect was largely predefined and did not vary much. Second, we chose not to engage much with the functional (why) characteristics as this could have produced biased results when only focusing on interviews during trade fairs. Instead, our focus was on studying the nature and practices of knowledge circulation, of which systematic empirical evidence does not exist otherwise.

Drawing on the work of Lachmann (1993), Backhaus (1997), Godefroid (1999a; 1999b), Pepels (1999), Fuchs (2003) and others, as well as studies of inter-firm interaction in economic geography and the business literature, we drew together a list of variables that impact or structure global buzz practices at international trade fairs (Figure 1). In this pragmatic approach, we aim to

provide evidence that communication and interaction patterns at international trade fairs are influenced by industry, firm and product characteristics. As shown in Figure 1, industry characteristics are studied according to economic sector; firm variables include economic function, firm size, distribution structure, market experience and market position; product characteristics include the degree of standardization in production, the degree of product standardization/individuality in design, market ability/structure and the structure of producer–user relations. Through this, we investigate in our empirical analysis which global buzz practices develop and how this differs between and within trade fairs. Our intention is not, of course, to develop a deterministic classification.

Insert Figure 1 about here

3. Study context and methodology

In order to investigate practices of global buzz and their variation at leading international trade fairs, a study was designed to analyze the information and communication ecology between exhibiting firms and their suppliers, customers, competitors and complementary firms (see, also, Bathelt and Schuldt 2008a). The analysis presented in this paper draws from extensive evidence collected during 460 semi-structured interviews with trade fair exhibitors, which were conducted between 2004 and 2006 at one national and six international trade fairs in Frankfurt/Main, Nürnberg and Hannover, Germany. Although this is a qualitative study based on the analysis of a limited number of trade fairs, we believe that the results reveal important aspects of leading international trade fairs in general. In fact, due to our broad empirical basis, we can even

investigate the effects of different variables across cases in a more systematic manner without losing in-depth knowledge about goals, intentions and practices.

To focus such a study on Germany is a useful starting point because it is one of the most important countries hosting international flagship fairs. According to the Ausstellungs- und Messe-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft (2009), events of a similar scale and importance can only be found in other Western European countries or the US.² In 2008, 153 international trade fairs took place in Germany with a total of 176,000 exhibitors and almost 10 million visitors. About 93,000 of the exhibitors (53%) and 2.6 million of the visitors (26%) represented foreign firms and organizations (Ausstellungs- und Messe-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft 2009), highlighting the international character and importance of these events.

Three trade fair locations were chosen for our analysis: Frankfurt/Main, Hannover and Nürnberg. Frankfurt/Main and Hannover are major trade fair centers in Germany hosting a substantial number of leading international trade fairs. Nürnberg is a somewhat smaller trade fair location and served as a control case. The most important trade fairs in Frankfurt/Main include the International Show for Passenger Cars (IAA), the Frankfurt Book Fair, Light and Building (L+B), International Trade Fair for the Meat Industry (IFFA), Tendance Lifestyle and many more. Hannover hosts leading technical trade fairs of global importance, such as CeBIT and

² According to the gross size of the exhibition spaces, three German trade fair centers are among the Top 5 worldwide: (1) Hannover Messegelände (495,265 m²), (2) Fiera Milano (345,000 m²), (3) China Import & Export Fair Complex Guangzhou (340,000 m²), (4) Frankfurt/Main Messegelände (321,754 m²), and (5) Köln Messegelände (284,000 m²). Although exhibition spaces in China have expanded rapidly in recent years and new ones been built, most of these do not (yet) have the scale of trade fair centers in Germany (Ausstellungs- und Messe-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft 2009).

HANNOVER MESSE. Nürnberg is home of the well-known International Toy Fair but otherwise primarily relies on national/regional technical fairs, such as ELTEC (Table 1).

Within the study period, major international trade fairs were selected for the study according to two types of industry/product groups: (i) investment goods, especially machinery goods and (ii) consumer goods with technical and/or design focus. Four of the seven trade fairs investigated were in the area of investment goods and three in the area of consumer goods. The main characteristics of these trade fairs are shown in Table 1. All of these fairs were business-to-business (B2B) events where firms present their exhibits to other firms, and not primarily to end customers.

Insert Table 1 about here

The sampling strategy conducted was similar to that advanced in earlier studies (see, Bathelt and Schuldt 2008a). We selected exhibiting firms to be interviewed and approached them at their exhibits. Firms to be included were selected according to a stratified random-sampling procedure. First, the number of exhibitors by country of origin, product group and exhibition hall was computed. Then, quotas were derived that enabled us to determine how many firms of different types had to be interviewed in each hall to establish a stratified sample. After some key accounts had been picked, firms to be approached were chosen randomly.

In order to reduce the amount of time to answer the questions,³ three types of interview guidelines were designed, i.e. focusing on interaction either with customers, competitors or suppliers, with a few overlapping questions. Each firm representative was asked to answer the questions of one of the three guidelines (Table 2). Sometimes, people voluntarily offered to also answer questions regarding other interview guides. Every interview guide had three sections: In the first section, questions about the firms and their goals and experience in terms of trade fair participation were asked. Generally, these were open-ended questions with further enquiries that depended on the answers given by the respondents. The questions in the second section focused on the ways in which existing and potential partners and competitors were contacted, when and where scheduled and accidental meetings took place, what kinds of interaction occurred, and which purposes various types of interaction served. These questions were either focused on customers, suppliers or competitors. Further, questions were intended to evaluate the role of trade fairs in generating new ideas for innovation and strategic direction. In the third part, interviewees were asked about the importance of trade fairs compared to other means to make contacts with customers and other partners, as well as about the role of personal contacts during these events. At the end, we requested some quantitative information about aspects, such as sales, employment and age. In the case of small and medium-sized firms, we usually interviewed owners or chief executives. In the case of large firms, we also included interviews with marketing directors, product developers and leading engineers. Each interview took on average 15 minutes, with a range from 6 to 95 minutes. Almost all interviews were recorded digitally, and later transcribed.

³ This was an important criterion, as firms do not have time for extended interviews during a trade fair.

Insert Table 2 about here

In the subsequent analysis of this largely qualitative data base, our goal was to condense interview results into categories representing practices of communication and observation, and identify regularities according to industry, firm and product characteristics. This was done in a stepwise procedure through which we attempted to generalize individual behavior and classify them into broader groups of practices. In characterizing these categories, we use quotes from our interviews that describe these practices in a graphic way. Furthermore, the industry, firm and product characteristics listed in Figure 1 were systematically identified and classified for each firm interviewed. Using communication and interaction patterns as dependent variables and industry, firm and product characteristics as independent variables enabled us to draw careful conclusions about those characteristics that had a strong impact on the variation of global buzz practices (see Table 3).⁴

4. Advantages and practices of global buzz

Global buzz associated with F2F communication during international trade fairs is extremely important as it generates openness and access to developments which occur in different

⁴ Due to this categorization process, we will be able to conduct quantitative analyses of the interaction patterns later on; in this paper, however, our focus is on exploring the variation in global buzz practices.

parts of the world. As demonstrated below, the advantages of global buzz are manifold and materialize in particular practices. When pointing at the importance of global buzz, our research shows that these practices differ substantially according to industry, firm and/or product characteristics (Figure 1). In the subsequent subsections, we provide evidence of the resulting diversity and variation in information and knowledge exchange practices at the trade fairs investigated. These practices are also associated with different types of benefits. The sections are organized according to (i) global knowledge exchange through F2F interaction, (ii) making sense of market trends, (iii) solving problems and recombining architectures and (iv) extending interpretative communities and building pipelines.

4.1 Global knowledge exchange through F2F interaction

In recent work, economic geographers have emphasized the importance of temporary F2F contact in processes of knowledge creation and dissemination in the global knowledge economy (e.g. Grabher 2002b; Norcliffe and Rendace 2003; Maskell, Bathelt and Malmberg 2006; Faulconbridge 2007). Despite the increasing integration of economic networks in global value chains, and the importance of ICT in day-to-day business routines, personal contact between people continues to be a decisive mechanism of circulating news, exchanging knowledge and solving problems (e.g. Bathelt and Schuldt 2008b). F2F communication offers two sets of advantages which result from the simultaneous presence of verbal and non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, direction of gaze, posture and gestures (Williams and Christie 1976). On the one hand, misunderstandings and misinterpretations can be reduced or avoided, and complex contents be transferred due to a direct feedback mechanism (e.g. Storper and Venables 2004). On the other hand, F2F communication allows agents to evaluate other participants and check their credibility (Goffman 1969; Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson 2000). This impacts the later

application of information in the corporate context and affects future interaction patterns between the same partners (e.g. Merten 1977).

Almost all participants interviewed emphasized these advantages and the importance of F2F communication at a high frequency and density. This included also interaction in the days shortly before and after the trade fairs which were used for scheduled business meetings. Especially, the possibilities of evaluating others and the high efficiency when talking to people who already know each other were often pointed out by our respondents. Despite the fact that F2F communication was generally viewed as being advantageous compared to other means of communication, the responses at different trade fairs also indicated that different practices in F2F communication with customers, suppliers, competitors and other partners exist (see, also, Fuchs 2003). In the following, we highlight differences between F2F practices by drawing on common types identified in our research.⁵ In doing this, we draw on the relational aspects of communication.⁶

In the case of manufacturers or trade specialists, for instance, we found that F2F practices in supplier–producer–user interaction differed according to the distribution structure (Godefroid 1999a; Pepels 1999; Blythe 2002). If these specialists had close customer contact through their sales force or regular contact networks with retail traders, F2F interaction with national customers was not a primary goal in attending trade fairs, as many interviewees at HANNOVER

⁵ While our research was much broader, the discussion of results, in essence, concentrates on the communication between exhibitors and their customers and suppliers.

⁶ It is clear that geographical proximity and direct face-to-face interaction do not automatically have a positive impact. What is decisive is how opportunities for communication and interaction are exploited in relational terms (Amin and Cohendet 2004).

MESSE, IFFA or L+B pointed out. A leading sales manager of a consumer-goods manufacturer expressed this as follows: “With foreign customers, we talk more often. These, we do not see as often as the Germans ... [The Germans], we meet anyway several times a year personally or through our sales representatives” (translated from German). Geographical proximity was mentioned as a precondition that enabled personal meetings throughout the course of a year whenever necessary. This was different when sales fairs and Internet sales were important distribution channels. Here, interaction was particularly intensive during the event, be it with national or international customers.

In the case of highly individualized products and small-batch production, firms were often found to rely strongly on trade fairs and the Internet to find customers and sell their products. Leading international trade fairs, like Paperworld or Tendence Lifestyle, were major sales events for these firms. This supports findings in the literature pointing out that trade fairs are still important market places and show rooms where deals are being negotiated (e.g. Power and Jansson 2008; Golfetto and Rinallo 2010), although there appears to be a broad decrease in the importance of the sales function of these events (Borghini, Golfetto and Rinallo 2006). International trade fairs were often the only or most direct opportunity to make personal contact with potential and existing customers from other countries and to extend market reach. The owner of a design firm specialized on paper accessories suggested that “[i]mpressions become sticky [during a trade fair]. One can visualize and illustrate everything much better. This is a first step, and then there is the face ... This is different from talking to someone on the phone who asks me to design something, without having seen this person before, because he lives in Brasilia or New Zealand” (translated from German). Indeed, there was a high likelihood for such encounters during international trade fairs, as many interviewees indicated. In this context, a designer of textile accessories emphasized the following regarding the communication patterns:

“Here, we receive many different views about our own issues and all other issues which are relevant for our business. There comes a Spaniard, a Frenchman, an American, or god knows who else, and they tell me what they think of an issue. And get to know what they want, through which lens they look and how you can see things in different lights, issues which I would not have thought of originally myself. We cross-fertilize each other and develop as a result of collective efforts. This works particularly [on the trade fairs grounds] ... as my experience has shown” (translated from German). This indicates that temporary F2F exchange at trade fairs can play a substantial role for future business success and the way of how different markets are approached.

As already mentioned, another distinction with respect to F2F practices can be made according to the degree of product standardization. More than half of the exhibitors interviewed used trade fairs systematically to schedule yearly routine meetings with major foreign customers and suppliers to exchange experiences, and negotiate future contracts. This was especially the case during consumer-goods fairs in the area of relatively standardized products, such as office equipment and accessories at Paperworld or life-style products and decorations at Tendence Lifestyle. In these cases, adjustments during the fair primarily focused on aspects, such as volume, delivery schedule and price (see, also, Merbold 1994). Our research also showed that the degree of product standardization not only had an impact on the substantive, but also on the structural level with respect to the length and depth of communication with customers, suppliers, competitors and other potential cooperation partners.

In the context of building and maintaining a trustful partnership, F2F communication was especially important for producers of investment goods at events, such as IFFA or HANNOVER MESSE. Since these events focus on products which require high investments, long-term commitments in the production process and ongoing customization, F2F communication with

potential customers was used to provide consulting services, establish initial trust or extend and reconfirm relations with existing customers (e.g. Håkansson 1982; Fuchs 2003). As the vice president of a global producer of electrical installation technology pointed out, “[t]he personal aspects here are very, very important. You have better access to the customer – to everyone – if you stand right in front of him. If the chemistry does not work out, then that’s it. I cannot trust anybody who I do not like, and that includes his products even more so. The first impression is very important, personal through direct eye gaze. Only this works!” (translated from German). In this context, the nature of producer–user relations also had a direct impact on global buzz practices. F2F communication was especially important when producer–user relations were long-term in character and when they involved complex communication associated with high costs and risks (e.g. Backhaus 1992; Merbold 1994; Godefroid 1999b).

However, not all manufacturing or trade specialists evaluated the importance of F2F communication during trade fairs equally high. Some of the producers and traders of mass products at trade fairs, such as Tendence Lifestyle, Paperworld, EuroMold and L+B, were wrapped up in price competition and seemed to be threatened by potential substitution through other products (see, also, Lachmann 1993). One producer of office equipment explained that the customer “... walks from one exhibit to the next; and s/he wants to have this opportunity to pass by and look ... This is the only thing we want to have. We want them to see all our wonderful products. Contacts and communication and all this nonsense – I tell you openly that we do not want and need all of this. When the customer later comes back to the exhibit if s/he likes something, then s/he does not want to negotiate. S/he asks how much this product costs ... And then s/he says: ‘O.k. I take it.’ or ‘I don’t take it’. The price determines, so there are no long relationships.”

In sum, interaction patterns of manufacturers and trade specialists at international trade fairs were highly differentiated depending on the type of agent interviewed, and on different firm and product characteristics. The practices observed were shaped by a common focus on learning-by-interaction. According to our study, practices of F2F communication with customers varied particularly according to variables, such as the distribution structure, type of producer–user interaction, market experience and degree of product standardization. Supplier interaction, in contrast, varied primarily according to industry, position within the production chain, firm size and degree of standardization in production. An overview of key influences on F2F communication practices is given in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

4.2 Making sense of market trends

The specific information and communication ecology which develops during international trade fairs is not just a function of the myriad of opportunities for direct personal communication. It is also shaped by impressions and observations which result from walking through the fair grounds and from more or less systematically scanning the different exhibits, as well as the agents and firms presenting these exhibits (Sharland and Balogh 1996, Fuchs 2003, Bathelt and Schuldt 2008a). While learning-by-interaction is the key in F2F communication, these processes are characterized through learning-by-observation and learning-by-inspection. In our research,

we found that systematic scanning of the exhibits enabled firms to acquire excessive information about world market trends and a broad market overview at a low cost.⁷ This provided a basis for critically evaluating one's own technological development path, as well as that of others. It was also an important source of information in making adaptations to strategies later on. However, our research indicated that the nature and contents of observations and information acquired differed between trade fairs, and according to firm and product characteristics.

In our interviews regarding practices of observation, we initially distinguished two main groups of firms across the different industry types: The first group consisted of firms who set trends and visualize them.⁸ These firms are of core importance for leading international trade fairs because they add weight to these fairs as trend-setting events. Without these agents, the attractiveness of the fairs would decline drastically as some interviewees pointed out. Recent discussions about German trade fairs, such as CeBIT or DIMA (e.g. m+a report 2004), indicate potential negative consequences which could result from this. The second group of firms consists primarily of recipients who aim to acquire information about major trends in an industry in order to adjust their strategies and structures later on.

⁷ Systematic scanning relates to the fact that firms spend a substantial amount of time during these events to check out their competition by using their own practices, innovations and goals as benchmarks to detect differences and deviating practices. Sometimes, this involved taking notes or photographs (even if this was not allowed by the trade fairs organizers). Often – although not always – the results of these comparisons were summarized in the form of a report. Firms concentrated on specific aspects in checking the exhibits, often split up between different specialists.

⁸ These trend setters are leading innovators, world markets leaders and other large multinational firms. Their exhibits and focus in innovation have a substantial impact and are noticed by many other firms.

As a product developer in the area of giftware at Tendence Lifestyle indicated, "... you can get an overview of all the trends, of what is 'in', or what others are launching to be introduced into the market. As a consequence, you can try to match [these trend-setters], or you try to differentiate yourself from them. You can see: 'Are you on the right track?', or 'Do I have something others do not have?', or decide: 'Make something in yellow or pink that others offer in red'. This I can do very, very nicely [during the trade fair] ..." (translated from German). In the context of consumer goods, the trends identified during a fair, such as Tendence Lifestyle, are implemented immediately and become part of the firms' repertoire after the event. Through this, the trends also impact the exhibits at subsequent trade fairs.

The development of investment goods is similarly shaped by the trends shown at previous leading trade fairs, such as HANNOVER MESSE. Technologies introduced at such fairs often have a strong impact on future business and ongoing research, but they also typically need a longer time in the development stage than many consumer products. In line with this, we found that the degree of standardization in production and in products had an impact on practices of inspection and making sense of market trends. Decisions about the adaptation or implementation of technologies in investment goods were not made during a trade fair, but were often initiated through encounters related to these events as many respondents mentioned. One has to be careful, however, when characterizing an investment-goods sector as one that is slowly moving, since these industries can also be characterized by more abrupt, radical changes. While the above distinction between trend-setters and trend-takers is not new, what is important in our context is the particular role trade fairs play in the development of trends and associated practices. As pointed out by Rosson and Seringhaus (1995), international trade fairs are a microcosm of the global developments within an industry or technology field, helping firms to evaluate market and technology trends.

In terms of the substantive level of global buzz in observation practices, manufacturers and trade firms with design focus emphasized that they would look for information about colors, shapes and types of materials and components used. Trends created or identified in design-intensive branches were to some degree linked to fashionable textile/clothing markets. New designs and accessories which have become dominant in these markets – be it through customer choices or concerted action of the producers and their associations (Rinallo and Golfetto 2006) – also have had a broad influence on the development of other consumer-goods sectors.

Producers of investment goods seemed to use the information gathered during an inspection of other exhibits primarily as a background preparation to make strategic decisions or adjustments later on (Backhaus 1997; Fuchs 2003). The sales manager of a firm in the area of air-condition technology was very clear of what he could potentially learn at the fair he attended: “The question which I can really clarify during this trade fair is: ‘What is my position in the market?’ ” (translated from German). Aside from basic performance indicators of different products and new technologies, which allow for systematic comparison, the information acquired during technical trade fairs concentrated on aspects, such as the development of new markets and the performance of new producers and users. In technical trade fairs, such as HANNOVER MESSE, the potential of acquiring useful information through visual inspection alone was, of course, limited. Important information about new technologies was often provided through industry associations and their activities in scanning market trends and defining standards. These activities were not dependent on trade fairs and access to it did not necessarily require attendance at these events. The R&D manager of a machinery producer explained why trade fairs nonetheless provided very important information for him: “Here we see what the technologies of tomorrow are and where we might have to start thinking in new directions. We can also see where we have to join in or dock on if we strive for leadership in areas, such as laser technology

or energy efficiency. We don't want to miss anything and that's why we walk through the exhibits. Also, our customers come to us to see what the new developments are. They also ask us what we think about new technological opportunities [and expect answers]" (translated from German).

This potential to identify future developments and new technological trajectories seemed particularly important at HANNOVER MESSE, IFFA, L+B, Paperworld and EuroMold. Some interview partners expressed that they find it fascinating to see how seemingly dominant trends diversify, split up and are interpreted in many different ways. The CEO of a specialized producer of switchgears and control gears from Switzerland said at L+B: "Rumors are verified or not. In the case of novelties, you can see for the first time which materials have been used, how long it took to develop them, and which features they have" (translated from German).

Representatives of established firms and market leaders, however, often responded that they primarily participated in trade fairs to show their presence, not necessarily to inspect other trends. Interestingly, this was similar across all trade fairs studied. An export manager of an Australian packaging-machine firm insisted: "I do not take home new ideas from here. The others primarily look at what we exhibit. I always call the first trade-fair day the spy day – the day of spying around. [In our case,] it is all about being there [so others can see us], nothing else. We are the strong ones. Look, at what we have to offer" (translated from German). These and other similar answers suggest that market experience is an important variable influencing the inspection behavior at international trade fairs.

Overall, this analysis shows that global buzz during trade fairs is an important source of information to spot possible future trends. Interviewees described how these ideas developed during a trade fair are checked against the overall firm strategy and become the trigger for further action after the fair. For young start-up firms, it was seemingly often sufficient to get an

overview of the global market of an industry (e.g. Kreienkamp-Rabe 2003; AUMA 2008). During IFFA and EuroMold, which are primarily characterized by investment goods, interviews also indicated that especially firms from less developed countries with little experience on international markets used these events to learn about products and technologies in other countries. A Turkish producer in the area of molding explained this as follows: “It is very important for us – interesting! We see new products and new ways to produce them. I can’t find such information in Turkey. We try, but here we have new customers and the market. I saw a mould maker here. Fantastic! Everything is very professional, and we want to do this in the same way.”

The spotting of trends during international trade fairs is closely associated with systematic observation and inspection of competitors and their activities. Variables which had an impact on the practices of acquiring information through observation and inspection included industry type, economic sector, firm size, market position and experience, as well as the degree of product standardization (Table 3).

4.3 Solving problems and recombining architectures

The above analysis shows that differences in the structure and effects of global buzz practices are, in part, related to differences between industrial sectors. Although this is by no means the dominant variable influencing the nature of F2F interaction and observation, it becomes especially important when investigating practices of solving problems (e.g. Fuchs 2003). Discussions around technical problems and technologies to new applications are quite common during investment-goods fairs, such as IFFA and EuroMold. These practices are less important in trade fairs, like Paperworld and Tendence Lifestyle, which have a design focus. Some of our interviewees described how both visitors and exhibitors send technical personnel through the

exhibition halls to spot out new technical solutions for existing or potential problems. In doing this, the participants benefit from the large variety of specialists and the concentration of competencies in the exhibition facilities (see, also, Sharland and Balogh 1996). Within a short time period, they are able to contact many potential partners or competent exhibitors during their inspection. The likelihood that they find valuable answers to their questions or find interesting ideas which could help overcome bottlenecks is extremely high in such a setting. As one executive at a technical trade fair mentioned, firms find out very quickly which options for potential solutions exist.

Potentially interesting partners were contacted after the trade fair for more detailed information exchange or possible future collaboration. Only occasionally, we came across participants, who made such contacts immediately after the trade fair. If acute problems did not exist, the procedure of getting in contact was different. Active contact would then typically be made at a later point associated with a specific need. The purchasing manager of a leading machinery producer characterized this process as follows: “Today, I saw something interesting: a totally new technological approach, of which I only read a bit before. But here you can experience it directly and you can check out the producer. We have discussed many different issues of how to apply this new technology and in which direction it will develop further ... Sometimes, the market is not quite ready yet and one has to look. I took the people’s business card and have them on my desk. If we find the right access to it, we will certainly contact them and have a deal” (translated from German). Through conversations and systematic inspection, firms got to know about possible architectures for new solutions, materials to use and advice. Moreover, they acquired important information about potential future partners.

Of course, trade fair facilities are not the places where problem solutions are designed, and innovations generated and physically tested. They offer, however, possibilities to find out about

reactions and perceptions in the market. As discussed above, the events also serve to accelerate and support processes of knowledge exchange about new products, supplies, technologies and designs. Our interviews indicated that this enabled visitors and exhibitors to discuss the consequences of product/concept variations and jointly develop ideas of how to apply innovations in production, or combine them with existing products and technologies. A Dutch designer in the area of functional illumination emphasized the importance of discovering new combinations during a trade fair and discussing them on the spot: “O.k., I saw something great and thought about how to use it – and apply it [to the architecture of my own products]. I discussed this with the people and they were surprised what kind of different purposes their technology could potentially serve. I also contacted my colleagues already, and they are also enthusiastic” (translated from German). This recombination of solutions and their application to a variety of different purposes occurred in both the technical and design-intensive fairs investigated. Our interviews suggest that trade fairs help firms to select new technological trajectories or alter existing ones (see, also, Blythe 2002). As such, they obviously are an important information source, even if this is not always reflected in industry surveys which analyze corporate information sources (e.g. Moriarty Jr. and Spekman 1984).

4.4 Extending interpretative communities and building pipelines

Meeting a similar group of agents in consecutive trade fairs which have a comparable education, technology focus and experience seemingly supports the formation of communities. The agents regularly participating in an industry’s major trade fairs share a common understanding based on their experience within the industry and interpret new developments through a similar lens. From this and their day-to-day experiences, focused communities develop and are continuously extended through repeated interaction. This was an observation during all

trade fairs investigated. Particularly firm characteristics influenced the existence and communication processes of focused communities (Table 3). At a minimum, participants of these communities share insights into technologies, knowledge about market changes, a similar vocabulary and understanding related to processes of formulating standards, and, thus, share a certain commitment to that technology. Sub-groups of specialists with similar experience form even closer communities, based on communities of practice (Wenger 1998) or epistemic communities (Knorr Cetina 1981), which enable them to engage in complex interaction and problem solving during trade fairs. The point is that these communities support communication and enable firms to interpret information to their advantage. According to our interviews, the effect of this is that communities become more clearly defined over time. Through joint experiences during various trade fairs and repeated discussions about the same topics, institutional arrangements develop further in incremental ways contributing to the collective evolution of these communities (Bathelt and Schuldt 2008a).⁹

The lighting specialist of a firm at L+B explained how these communities were supported by F2F communication. F2F communication helped to select those partners with whom he shared similar thinking patterns, feelings, evaluation schemes and the like: “Through personal conversation you just notice whether you understand one another, how well you fit together and whether difficulties could arise in adjustments or due to miscommunication ... This is how people function. In my case, I would say, 90% [of the evaluations of other people] are based on

⁹ Of course, a convergence of interpretations could lead to negative lock-in processes (Martin and Sunley 2006). However, this is not very likely to happen during large international trade fairs as these events involve many diverse agents who draw their own conclusions on how to react to market changes and what strategic decisions to make. The interpretations formed during these events do not lead to homogenous responses in innovation processes.

common understanding and sympathy. You just have to be compatible” (translated from German). This seemed to be particularly important for engineers, engaged in the development of design-intensive products. It also applied to employees with extensive experience in their industry. They were characterized by a high degree of self-confidence and participation in larger networks. In part, these professionals were also connected with one another through professional associations within which communication was focused on members. These organizations establish exclusive networks that cut across firms. As in the case of ‘efsa’ – the association of florist and lifestyle producers – they involved complementary firms, while direct competitors were relatively rare. These professional associations to some degree support the formation and extension of communities. They sometimes organize the trade fairs, and accomplish exchange and discussion between their members. The association ‘efsa’, for instance, even developed joint color palettes from which both member and non-member firms would choose.

Despite these advantages, not all firms actively participated in such focused communities and utilized their benefits. In general, we found that particularly trade firms did not want to participate, as opposed to manufacturers or creatives. Many firms pointed out that they were not interested in an idea exchange with colleagues or in community formation during the fair days. What counted for them was the personal contact with customers, even though this rarely involved conversations about specific products. In the case of multinational manufacturing firms, interaction practices often focused on internal corporate networks (Bathelt and Schuldt 2008a), and less so on external communities. The goal of intra-firm meetings was to deepen contacts within an international corporate context.

Compared to large firms, young small firms were often not yet long enough in business to be part of these communities, and consequently did not participate actively. A British export manager mentioned: “It is our second time exhibiting. So, you know, we do not know somebody

here. It is only normal business talk with other exhibitors, our neighbors – but non-intensive. I do not meet people I know, not yet.” This further demonstrated that market newcomers sometimes had difficulties in accessing information which required prior contact to others. Although these small firms needed to learn more about market contexts and communication patterns than others, their opportunities were supposedly more limited because of a lack of experience and little knowledge about communication practices at trade fairs.

Over time, latent networks seemed to develop, as our interviewees indicated, which could be activated later without time-consuming negotiations (Grabher 2002a; Maskell, Bathelt and Malmberg 2006). To become insider in a circle of people who get together regularly can have clear advantages and might reduce transaction costs in the future. Although we did not ask directly for the causal relationships between latent networks and future benefits, we received some indirect information. More than half of the respondents said that they regularly meet a similar group of exhibitors during such events (see, also, Power and Jansson 2008). Not all respondents (e.g. producers of standardized consumer goods and mass products at Tendence Lifestyle) thought, however, that pre-existing networks were decisive.

5. Conclusions

This paper presents empirical evidence about the various levels and practices of global buzz from which firms greatly benefit when they actively attend leading international trade fairs. Global buzz results from intensive F2F interaction between dedicated agents and firms representing global supply and demand, as well as manifold possibilities for observation and multiplex meetings between members of intersecting interpretative communities (Bathelt and Schuldt 2008a). The unique information and communication ecology at these events enables

specialists to gather information and knowledge, learn about products and technologies, solve problems, establish or extend networks and adjust global market and product strategies (e.g. Maskell, Bathelt and Malmberg 2006; Schuldt and Bathelt 2009).

This paper, for the first time, presents empirical findings from an explorative study arguing that this global buzz can take many different forms depending on the specifics of the trade fairs, industries, firms and products which are involved. Related to these characteristics, differences can be identified in the contents discussed, the prevailing patterns of interaction and the structure of observation and inspection. We have demonstrated this by analyzing consumer-goods and investment-goods fairs in Germany. In our research, we found that global buzz at consumer-goods fairs focused on visible contents, design aspects, potential applications and the effect on end customers. During investment-goods fairs, aspects of technical layout, performance indicators, novel technical solutions, user experience, new markets and materials and price aspects were of primary interest. During the latter events, strategic information was seemingly more important than actual design aspects, although even here the performative character of fairs was omni-present. Furthermore, producer–user relations played a key role in the communication patterns.

In order to differentiate structural aspects of global buzz, it is necessary to engage more thoroughly in the analysis of specific needs and characteristics of the agents involved. These, in turn, vary depending on the products fabricated and the structure of firms (Figure 1). Although we do not intend to develop a deterministic typology of how different types of firms behave during international trade fairs, we found some interesting regularities (Table 3). The stylized patterns identified resulted from stepwise generalization by interpreting the answers received across the different industry, firm and product variables in a systematic fashion. Medium-sized producers of standardized durable consumer goods, for instance, seemed to be largely focused on

new customers; the exchange of information in F2F meetings remained quite general, however. In contrast, medium-sized producers of custom-made durable consumer goods particularly tried to attract established customers to strengthen partnerships. They did not expect to meet many potentially new partners at these events. Contextual variables, such as firm size, position in the value chain, degree of standardization in production and distribution structure were important, according to our analysis, to understand the firms' particular communication needs and impacted global buzz practices.

Due to the fact that interaction practices were found to be highly differentiated, global buzz contributed in different ways to the goals of individuals and firms. This supports claims made in recent work about (i) the importance of information and knowledge flows at international trade fairs and (ii) the role of international trade fairs in connecting the global political economy (Borghini, Golfetto and Rinallo 2004; Schuldt and Bathelt 2009). Yet, a full evaluation of the importance of global buzz in innovation processes still requires a lot more empirical work, especially comparing trade fairs by using quantitative analyses. A more nuanced evaluation or comparison of buzz between different types of firms, industries and product groups can hardly be accomplished at this point. We are still in a stage where our knowledge about the role of trade fairs and global buzz practices is limited. Therefore, we draw on binaries such as large vs. small firms, creative vs. technical focus, consumer vs. investment goods, standardized vs. custom-made products and the like. To provide a better understanding, learning processes of firms during international trade fairs have to be studied at greater depth. In which way global buzz is useful to firms eventually also depends on the procedures used by firms and individuals to record and analyze this buzz, as well as on the routines implemented after trade fairs to extract important insights and new knowledge, and distribute it internally across different divisions, sites and even countries.

Aside from the individual benefits of firms, there is also a potential societal benefit when new technologies or ideas are spread during a trade fair and become the trigger of broader economic development. Our research indicates that global buzz generates important incentives for, and corrective mechanisms to, innovation processes in consumer-goods and investment-goods industries. Ideas which are developed during a trade fair are checked against overall firm strategies and affect the action after the fair, potentially leading to innovation and new networks in the future.

Acknowledgements

Parts of this paper were presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Boston, MA, April 15-19. ~~The paper draws upon research which was jointly conducted by both authors, who contributed equally to it.~~ For critical comments and thoughtful remarks we wish to thank Patrick Cohendet, Rachael Gibson, Oliver Ibert, Wendy Larner and Sally Weller, ~~as well as two anonymous Referees.~~ Parts of this research were funded by the Canada Research Chair in Innovation and Governance at the University of Toronto, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Council), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Dr. Wolff Foundation in Marburg, Germany.

References

- Amin, A. and Cohendet, P. (2004): *Architectures of Knowledge: Firms, Capabilities, and Communities*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ausstellungs- und Messe-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft (2007): *Die Messewirtschaft, Bilanz 2006 (Trade Fair Industry, Balance Sheet 2006)*. Berlin: AUMA.
- Ausstellungs- und Messe-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft (2008): *Die Messewirtschaft, Bilanz 2007 (Trade Fair Industry, Balance Sheet 2007)*. Berlin: AUMA.

- Ausstellungs- und Messe-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft (2009): *Die Messewirtschaft, Bilanz 2007 (Trade Fair Industry, Balance Sheet 2008)*. Berlin: AUMA.
- Backhaus, K. (1992): Messen als Institutionen der Informationspolitik (Trade fairs as institutions of information policy). In: Strothmann, K.-H. and Busche, M. (Eds.): *Handbuch Messemarketing (Handbook of Trade Fair Marketing)*. pp. 83-97. Wiesbaden: Gabler.
- Backhaus, K. (1997): *Industriegütermarketing (Investment-Goods Marketing)*. München: Vahlen.
- Bathelt, H., Malmberg, A. and Maskell, P. (2004): Clusters and knowledge: local buzz, global pipelines and the process of knowledge creation. *Progress in Human Geography* **28**: 31-56.
- Bathelt, H. and Schuldt, N. (2008a): Between luminaires and meat grinders: international trade fairs as temporary clusters. *Regional Studies* **42**: 853-865.
- Bathelt, H. and Schuldt, N. (2008b): Temporary Face-to-Face Contact and the Ecologies of Global and Virtual Buzz. *SPACES online* (2008-04). Toronto, Heidelberg: www.spaces-online.com (URL: <http://www.spaces-online.com>, date accessed August 14, 2008).
- Blythe, J. (2002): Using trade fairs in key account management. *Industrial Marketing Management* **31**: 627-635.
- Borghini, S., Golfetto, F. and Rinallo, D. (2004): *Using Anthropological Methods to Study Industrial Marketing and Purchasing: An Exploration of Professional Trade Shows*. Paper presented at the Industrial Marketing Purchasing Conference, Copenhagen.
- Borghini, S., Golfetto, F. and Rinallo, D. (2006): Ongoing search among industrial buyers. *Journal of Business Research* **59**: 1151-1159.
- Deeter-Schmelz, D. R. and Kennedy, K. N. (2002): An exploratory study of the Internet as an industrial communication tool. *Industrial Marketing Management* **31**: 145-154.
- Döring, N. (1999): *Sozialpsychologie im Internet: Die Bedeutung des Internet für Kommunikationsprozesse, Identitäten, soziale Beziehungen und Gruppen (Social Psychology and the Internet: The Importance of the Internet for Communication, Identities, Social Relations and Groups)*. Göttingen: Hogrefe.
- Dressler, E. (2005a): *EuroMold + turntec aktuell. Ausgabe 1/2005, 30. November 2005 (Euromold + turntec up-to-date. Edition 1/2005, November 30, 2005)*. Frankfurt/Main.
- Dressler, E. (2005b): *EuroMold + turntec aktuell. Ausgabe 2/2005, 1. Dezember 2005 (Euromold + turntec up-to-date. Edition 2/2005, December 1, 2005)*. Frankfurt/Main.

- Dürscheid, C. (2005): Medien, Kommunikationsformen, kommunikative Gattungen (Media and types of communication). *Linguistik online* **22** (1/05).
- Entwistle, J. and Rocamora, A. (2006): The field of fashion materialized: a study of London Fashion Week. *Sociology* **40**: 735-751.
- Faulconbridge, J. R. (2007): Relational spaces of knowledge production in transnational law firms. *Geoforum* **38**: 925-940.
- Fuchs, W. (2003): *Management von Business-to-Business-Kommunikation. Instrumente – Maßnahmen – Beispiele (Management to Business to Business Communication. Instruments – Measures – Examples)*. Wiesbaden: Gabler.
- Gallié, E.-P. and Guichard, R. (2002): *The Impact of ICT Sophistication on Geographically Distant Networks: The Case of Space Physics as seen from France*. Presented at the Workshop TIC et réorganisation spatiale des activités économiques, Brest (URL: http://www-eco.enst-bretagne.fr/workshop2002/NTIC-et-sante/Communications/Gallie_Guichard.pdf, date accessed May 9, 2007).
- Godefroid, P. (1999a): Vertriebsstruktur im Business-to-Business-Bereich (Distribution structure in the business-to-business sector). In: Pepels, W. (Ed.): *Business to Business Marketing*. pp. 293-311. Neuwied, Kriftel: Luchtenhand.
- Godefroid, P. (1999b): Vertriebsmanagement (Distribution management). In: Pepels, W. (Ed.): *Business to Business Marketing*. pp. 273-292. Neuwied, Kriftel: Luchtenhand.
- Goehrmann, K. E. (1992): Messen im technischen Entwicklungsprozess (Trade fairs in the technical development process). In: Strothmann, K.-H. and Busche, M. (Eds.): *Handbuch Messemarketing (Handbook of Trade Fair Marketing)*. pp. 51-66. Wiesbaden: Gabler.
- Goffman, E. (1969): *Behavior in Public Places*. New York: Free Press.
- Golfetto, F. and Rinallo, D. (2010): *Competition among Temporary Clusters: A Longitudinal Study of the European Clothing Fabric Trade Shows (1986-2006)*. Paper Presented in the Seminar “Culture, Competition, and Trade Shows” , Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Grabher, G. (2002a): Cool projects, boring institutions: temporary collaboration in social context. *Regional Studies* **36**: 205-214.
- Grabher, G. (2002b): The project ecology of advertising: tasks, talents and teams. *Regional Studies* **36**: 245-262.

- Håkansson, H. (Ed.) (1982): *International Marketing and Purchasing of Industrial Goods: An Interaction Approach*. Chicester, New York: Wiley.
- HANNOVER MESSE (2006): *Statistiken 2006 (Statistics 2006)*. Hannover (URL: <http://www.hannovermesse.de//36008.de>, date accessed 25. May 2006).
- Hildreth, P., Kimble, C. and Wright, P. (2000): Communities of practice in the distributed international environment. *Journal of Knowledge Management* **4** (1): 27-38.
- Knorr Cetina, K. (1981): *The Manufacture of Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kreienkamp-Rabe, R. (2003): Warum Auslandsmesseförderung? (Why support foreign trade fair participation?). *Zeitschrift für öffentliche und gemeinwirtschaftliche Unternehmen* **30**: 84-87.
- Lachmann, U. (1993): Kommunikationspolitik bei langlebigen Konsumgütern. In: Berndt, R. and Hermanns, A. (Eds.): *Handbuch Marketing Kommunikation. Strategien – Instrumente – Perspektiven (Handbook of Marketing Communication. Strategies – Instruments – Perspectives)*. pp. 831-856. Wiesbaden: Gabler.
- m+a report* (2004): DIMA – Zu viele bekannte Gesichter, zu wenig Business (DIMA – Too many well-known faces, too little business). August, p. 15-16.
- Martin, R. and Sunley, P. (2006): Path dependence and regional economic evolution. *Journal of Economic Geography* **6**: 35-437.
- Maskell, P., Bathelt, H. and Malmberg, A. (2006): Building global knowledge pipelines: the role of temporary clusters. *European Planning Studies* **14**: 997-1013.
- Merbold, C. (1994): *Business-to-Business Kommunikation. Bedingungen und Wirkungen (Business-to-Business Communication. Preconditions and Consequences)*. Hamburg: Spiegel.
- Messe Frankfurt GmbH (2004a): *IFFA/IFFA-Delicat, Internationaler Treffpunkt für die Fleischwirtschaft vom 15. bis 20. Mai 2004 in Frankfurt am Main: Aussteller nach Ländern (Data Report of Exhibitors by Origin at IFFA from May 15 through 20, 2004)*. Frankfurt/Main, Press Release, May 10.
- Messe Frankfurt GmbH (2004b): *IFFA/IFFA-Delicat, Internationaler Treffpunkt für die Fleischwirtschaft vom 15. bis 20. Mai 2004 in Frankfurt am Main: IFFA/IFFA-Delicat 2004 fest im Sattel (General Report of Exhibitors and Visitors by Origin at IFFA from May 15 through 20, 2004)*. Frankfurt/Main, Press Release, May 12.

- Messe Frankfurt GmbH (2004c): *Light + Building, Internationale Fachmesse für Architektur und Technik, vom 18. bis 22. April 2004 in Frankfurt am Main: Aussteller in Zahlen (Data Report of Exhibitors at the Light + Building from April 18 through 22, 2004)*. Frankfurt/Main, Press Release, April 15.
- Messe Frankfurt GmbH (2004d): *Light + Building, Internationale Fachmesse für Architektur und Technik, vom 18. bis 22. April 2004 in Frankfurt am Main: Schlussbericht (Final Report of Light + Building from April 18 through 22, 2004)*. Frankfurt/Main, Press Release, April 22.
- Messe Frankfurt GmbH (2005a): *Tendence Lifestyle, Internationale Frankfurter Messe, vom 26. bis 30. August 2005: Aussteller nach Ländern und Lifestylewelten (Data Report of Exhibitors at the Tendence Lifestyle by Origin and Lifestyleworlds from August 26 through 30, 2005)*. Frankfurt/Main, Press Release, August 19.
- Messe Frankfurt GmbH (2005b): *Tendence Lifestyle from August 26 through 30, 2005: Decorate Life*, Frankfurt/Main, Press Release, August 26.
- Messe Frankfurt GmbH (2005c): *Tendence Lifestyle, Internationale Frankfurter Messe, vom 26. bis 30. August 2005: Schlussbericht (Final Report of Tendence Lifestyle from August 26 through 30, 2005)*. Frankfurt/Main, Press Release, August 30.
- Messe Frankfurt GmbH (2006a): *Paperworld – The World of Office and Paper Products, Internationale Frankfurter Messe, vom 25. bis 29. Januar 2006: Aussteller nach Ländern (Data Report at the Tendence Lifestyle by Origin of Exhibitors from January 25 through 29, 2006)*. Frankfurt/Main, Press Release, January 16.
- Messe Frankfurt GmbH (2006b): *Paperworld – The World of Office and Paper Products Internationale Frankfurter Messe, vom 25. bis 29. Januar 2006: Fachabschlussbericht (Final Report of Paperworld from January 25 through 29, 2006)*. Frankfurt/Main, Press Release, January 29.
- Messe Frankfurt GmbH (2007): *Messe Frankfurt sets new records for sales and visitor numbers in 2007*. Frankfurt/Main, Press Release, Nov 29.
- Messe Nürnberg GmbH (2005): *Kurzanalyse ELTEC 2005, Nürnberg 15. bis 17. Juni 2005 (Executive Analysis ELTEC 2005, Nürnberg from June 15 through 17, 2005)*. Nürnberg, Press Release, June 30.

- Moriarty Jr., R. T. and Spekman, R. E. (1984): An empirical investigation of the information sources used during the industrial buying process. *Journal of Marketing Research* **21**: 137-147
- Moriset, B. and Malecki, E. J. (2009): Organization versus space: the paradoxical geographies of the digital economy. *Geography Compass* **3**: 256-274.
- Norcliffe, G. and Rendace, O. (2003): New geographies of comic book production in North America: the new artisans, distancing, and the periodic social economy. *Economic Geography* **79**: 241-273.
- NürnbergMesse GmbH (2007): *The best years are still to come at NürnbergMesse*. Nürnberg, Press Release, December.
- Pepels, W. (1999): Geschäftsarten im Business-to-Business Marketing (business practices in business-to-business marketing). In: Pepels, W. (Ed.): *Business to Business Marketing*. pp. 159-175. Neuwied, Kriftel: Luchtenhand.
- Power, D. and Jansson, J. (2008): Cyclical clusters in global circuits: overlapping spaces and furniture industry trade fairs. *Economic Geography* **84**: 423-448.
- Prüser, S. M. (1997): *Messemarketing: Ein netzwerkorientierter Ansatz (Trade Fair Marketing: A Network Approach)*. Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag.
- Prüser, S. M. (2003): Die Messe als Networking-Plattform (Trade fairs as a platform for networking). In: Kirchgeorg, M., Dornscheidt, W. M., Giese, W. and Stoeck, N. (Eds.): *Handbuch Messemanagement: Planung, Durchführung und Kontrolle von Messen, Kongressen und Events (Handbook of Trade Fair Management: Planning, Execution and Control of Trade Fairs, Conventions and Events)*. pp. 1181-1195. Wiesbaden: Gabler.
- Ramírez-Pasillas, M. (2008): Resituating proximity and knowledge cross-fertilization in clusters by means of international trade fairs. *European Planning Studies* **16**: 643-663.
- Rinallo, D. and Golfetto, F. (2006): Representing markets: the shaping of fashion trends by French and Italian fabric companies. *Industrial Marketing Management* **35**: 856-869.
- Rosson, P. J. and Seringhaus, F. H. R. (1995): Visitor and exhibitor interaction at industrial trade fairs. *Journal of Business Research* **32**: 81-90.
- Schmitz, U. (2004): *Sprache in modernen Medien: Einführung in Tatsachen und Theorien, Themen und Thesen (Language in Modern Media: An Introduction to Facts and Theories, Themes and Theses)*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt.

- Schuldt, N. and Bathelt, H. (2009): Reflexive Zeit- und Raumkonstruktionen und die Rolle des Global Buzz auf Messeveranstaltungen (Reflexive time–space constructions and the role of global buzz at trade fairs). *Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie* **53**: 235-248.
- Sharland, A. and Balogh, P. (1996): The Value of Nonselling Activities at International Trade Shows. *Industrial Marketing Management* **25**: 59-66.
- Short, J., Williams, E. and Christie, B. (1976): *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications*. New York: Wiley.
- Storper, M. and Venables, A. J. (2004): Buzz: face-to-face contact and the urban economy. *Journal of Economic Geography* **4**: 351-370.
- Walther, J. B., Loh, T. and Granka, L. (2005): Let me count the ways: the interchange of verbal and nonverbal cues in computer-mediated and face-to-face affinity. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* **24** (1): 36-65.
- Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J. H. and Jackson, D. D. (2000): *Menschliche Kommunikation – Formen, Störungen, Paradoxien (Human Communication – Forms, Interferences, Contradictions)*. 10th edition. Bern: Huber.
- Wenger, E. (1998): *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wickham, J. and Vecchi, A. (2008): Local Firms and Global Reach: Business Air Travel and the Irish Software Cluster. *European Planning Studies* **16**: 693-710.

Table 1. Characteristics of seven national/international trade fairs in Germany, 2004 – 2006 (Sources: Dressler 2005b; HANNOVER MESSE 2006; Messe Frankfurt GmbH 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2004d; 2005a; 2005c; 2005d; 2006a; 2006b; NürnbergMesse GmbH 2005)

Trade fair	Year	Rhythm of events	Location	Spatial reach	Product focus	Exhibitors (number)	Foreign exhibitors (share)	Country presence (number)	Exhibition space (m ²)	Visitors (number)	Foreign visitors (share)	Main visitor groups
IFFA	2004	Tri-annual	Frankfurt/Main	Inter-national	Investment goods	850	49%	43	102,000	57,500	39%	Decision makers/ engineers
L+B	2004	Bi-annual	Frankfurt/Main	Inter-national	Consumer goods	1,900	57%	53	109,000	116,100	28%	Self-employed/ traders
Tendence Lifestyle	2005	Yearly	Frankfurt/Main	Inter-national	Consumer goods	3,400	58%	81	116,000	91,100	26%	Retail/ wholesale traders
Euro-Mold	2005	Yearly	Frankfurt/Main	Inter-national	Investment goods	1,500	31%	39	78,000	58,900	19%	Machinery producers/ industrial designers/ engineers
Paper-world	2006	Yearly	Frankfurt/Main	Inter-national	Consumer goods	2,600	77%	67	93,000	64,400	43%	Retailers/ creatives/ purchasing agents
HANN-OVER MESSE	2006	Yearly	Hannover	Inter-national	Investment goods	5,200	49%	66	154,000	155,000	29%	Decision makers/ engineers/ technical personnel
ELTEC	2005	Yearly	Nürnberg	National	Investment goods	250	5%	4	10,000	12,000	3%	Self-employed/ corporate division heads

Table 2. Number of interviews conducted at seven national/international trade fairs in Germany by interaction type and nationality of exhibitors, 2004 – 2006 (Source: survey results)

Interview focus	Number of interviews at														Total
	L+B		IFFA		Tendence Lifestyle		EuroMold		Paperworld		HANNOVER MESSE		ELTEC		
	with German firms	with foreign firms	with German firms	with foreign firms	with German firms	with foreign firms	with German firms	with foreign firms	with German firms	with foreign firms	with German firms	with foreign firms	with German firms	with foreign firms	
Customer interaction	21	4	22	16	38	17	15	8	11	11	5	3	22	5	198
Supplier interaction	5	3	6	6	11	5	15	6	10	10	2	2	4	1	86
Competitor interaction	25	8	21	5	39	10	12	7	8	7	5	3	24	2	176
Total	51	15	49	27	88	32	42	21	29	28	12	8	50	8	460

Influencing variable	Influences on					
	customer interaction	supplier interaction	competitor interaction	interaction with partners	observation/inspection	focused communities
Industry characteristics		X			X	
Economic sector	X	X	X	X	X	X
Firm size	X	X	X	X	X	X
Distribution structure	X			X		
Market experience	X			X	X	X
Market position			X		X	X
Degree of standardization in production		X				
Degree of product standardization	X	X	X		X	X
Market ability/structure			X			
Structure of producer–user relations	X					

Table 3. Observed influences structuring global buzz practices at seven national/international trade fairs in Germany, 2004 – 2006 (Source: survey results)

Figure 1. Variables structuring global buzz practices at international trade fairs (Sources: After Lachmann 1993; Backhaus 1997; Godefroid 1999a; 1999b; Pepels 1999; Fuchs 2003)