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Vision & Intelligence

EVIDENCE BRIEF
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EVIDENCE BRIEF · INDUSTRY EVENTS AND MARKETS

The Stage Belongs to the Organizer

Who holds power at field-level events?

Conference programs look neutral, but who speaks, how the stage is set and which stories are told decide whose view of an industry prevails. Studies of Israeli technology conferences, a UN chemicals convention, German music industry events and Maker Faires show where power sits at industry events and how weaker actors push back.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026 Israel, Germany, U.S., Worldwide

5 studies

conference programming | power at events | agenda setting | speaker diversity | industry narratives | venture capital conferences | counter-narratives | Maker Faire | music industry events | stakeholder voice

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KEY FINDING

Power at industry events works through who speaks, how the stage is set and which stories are told: organizers and investors dominate programs and narratives. Weaker actors gain influence through corridors, outside media and counter-narratives, and the emotions events create align a field's story but cut both ways.

Five studies, 2010–2021

Key findings

- **Entrepreneurs filled the room, not the stage.** At two Israeli biotech conferences in 2005 and 2006, entrepreneurs made up 60 percent of participants but only 12 percent of speakers [1].
- **One story dominated.** 22 of the 26 presentations carried the same message: entrepreneurs lack the knowledge and connections that service providers and investors can supply [1].
- **Programs reveal agendas.** At an Israeli high-tech conference in 2002, politicians and officials made up 35 percent of the plenary program and investors 47 percent, as investors pressed for tax and guarantee policies; a rival conference had no officials and no entrepreneurs on its program [2].
- **Weaker actors win through counter-narratives.** An open letter signed by more than 400 doctors and scientists helped turn DDT from an evil to be banned into a necessary evil for malaria control in the Stockholm Convention [3].
- **Event landscapes mirror power shifts.** German music industry events with a conference program rose from three in 1997 to 19 in 2009, with reform-minded and radical events outnumbering those defending existing copyright models [4].

FOR THE MARKET

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Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Organisers & associations	Speaker mix, room layout and session formats are statements of whose view counts; audiences notice when the people in the seats are absent from the stage. Formats with open microphones and mixed panels widen whose knowledge reaches the field.
Exhibitors & sponsors	Influence at industry events also runs through corridors, side events, outside media and rival events; groups absent from the main program can still shape the outcome.
Investors & advisers	Investor-led conference programs frame industries in investment terms and carry policy asks; they show the investor view of a field more than the field's full picture.

Power on the program

The audience and the stage can be two different industries. At two biotech conferences in Tel Aviv in 2005 and 2006, organized by service providers with a leading venture capital firm as co-sponsor, entrepreneurs made up 60 percent of participants but only 12 percent of speakers[1]. Moderators were investors or representatives of large corporations, never entrepreneurs[1].

The stage told one story. 22 of the 26 presentations shared the message that entrepreneurs lack crucial knowledge and connections that service providers and investors can supply, and most framed biotech purely as business[1]. Speakers stood on an elevated stage with amplification while the audience sat in long rows without microphones, and the room stayed silent[1].

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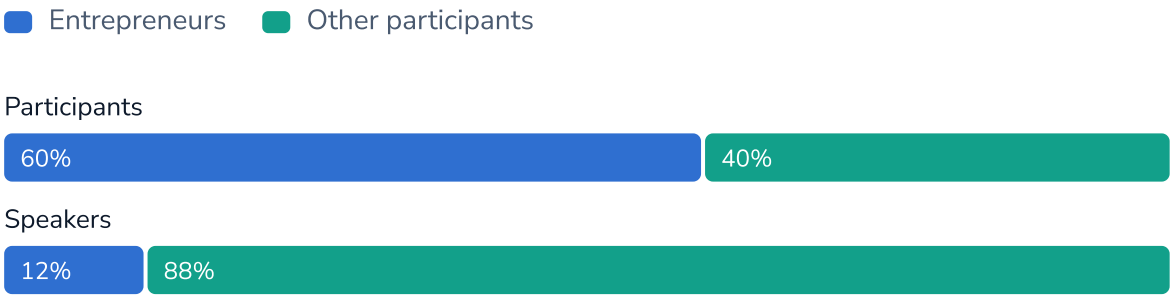
Share of entrepreneurs among participants and speakers at biotech conferences in Israel in 2005 and 2006

Share of participants and of speakers.



Source: Gross & Zilber · Release date: 2020 · Region: Israel (Tel Aviv) · Events: two annual conferences, 2005 and 2006 · Presentations: 26

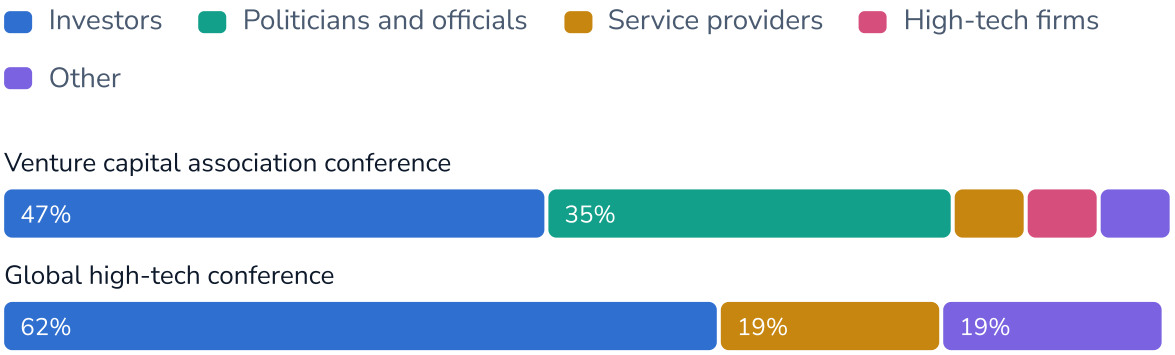
Different stages, different stories

Rival events let the same actors tell different stories. At two Israeli high-tech conferences in 2002, after the dot-com crash, the venture capital association's conference spoke to a national audience: 91 percent of its plenary was in Hebrew, and politicians and officials made up 35 percent of the plenary program[2]. Investors used the stage to press for government equity guarantees, tax deductions and changes to research and immigration laws[2].

The second conference spoke to a global audience: its plenary was 62.5 percent in English, with a keynote from Harvard Business School on the U.S. venture capital industry, and it had no government officials and no entrepreneurs on its program[2]. The same investors and service providers used different discourses in different spaces for different audiences[2].

Composition of the plenary programs of two Israeli high-tech conferences in 2002, by participant group

Share of program participants.



Source: Zilber · Release date: 2011 · Region: Israel · Year: 2002

How weaker actors gain influence

Corridors and outside media give weaker actors a voice. In the five UN negotiating meetings from 1998 to 2000 that produced the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants, only states could propose wording in the plenary; nongovernmental organizations lobbied in the corridors and through letters, press releases and scientific articles[3].

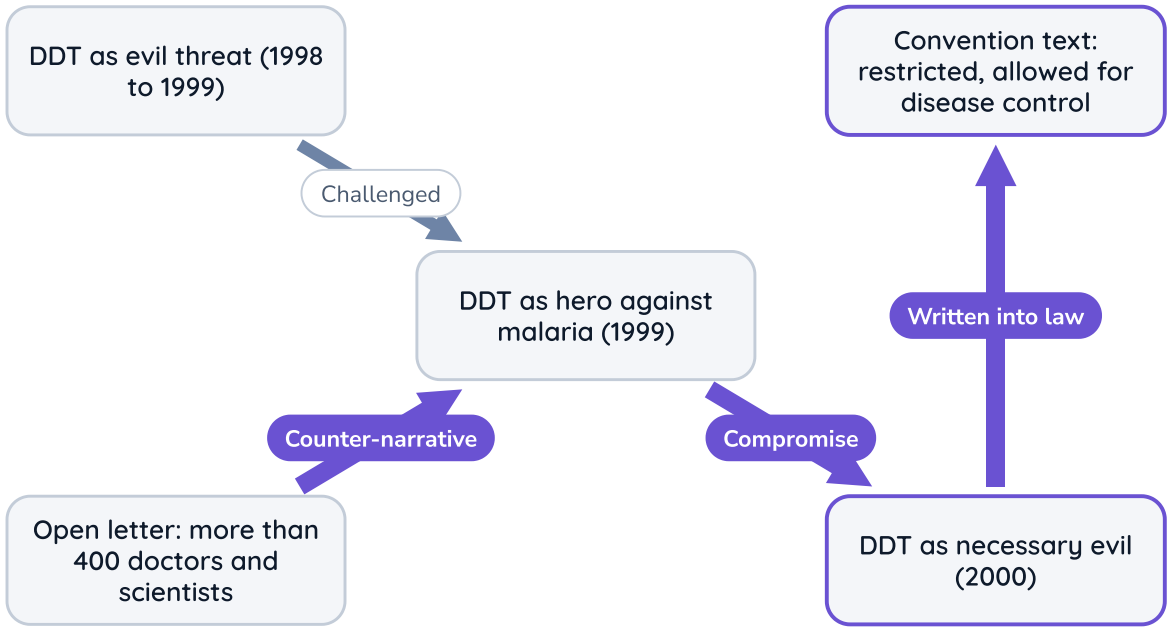
The story about DDT changed in three steps. It began as an evil threat to be eliminated; an open letter signed by more than 400 doctors and scientists, including three Nobel laureates, recast it as a hero against malaria; and the final meeting settled on a necessary evil, written into the convention as a restriction with exemptions for disease control[3]. The international pesticide network that lost the argument recruited African members, raising their share from under two percent to over 12 percent[3].

Narratives about DDT during the Stockholm Convention negotiations from 1998 to 2000

Sequence of dominant narratives; the highlighted route shows how a counter-narrative reached the legal text.

Main route Other links

Arrow width marks the main route, not a measured value · dashed: weak or no link



Source: Hardy & Maguire · Release date: 2010 · Region: Worldwide · Period: 1998 to 2000 · Meetings: 5; interviews: 40

Event landscapes as battlegrounds

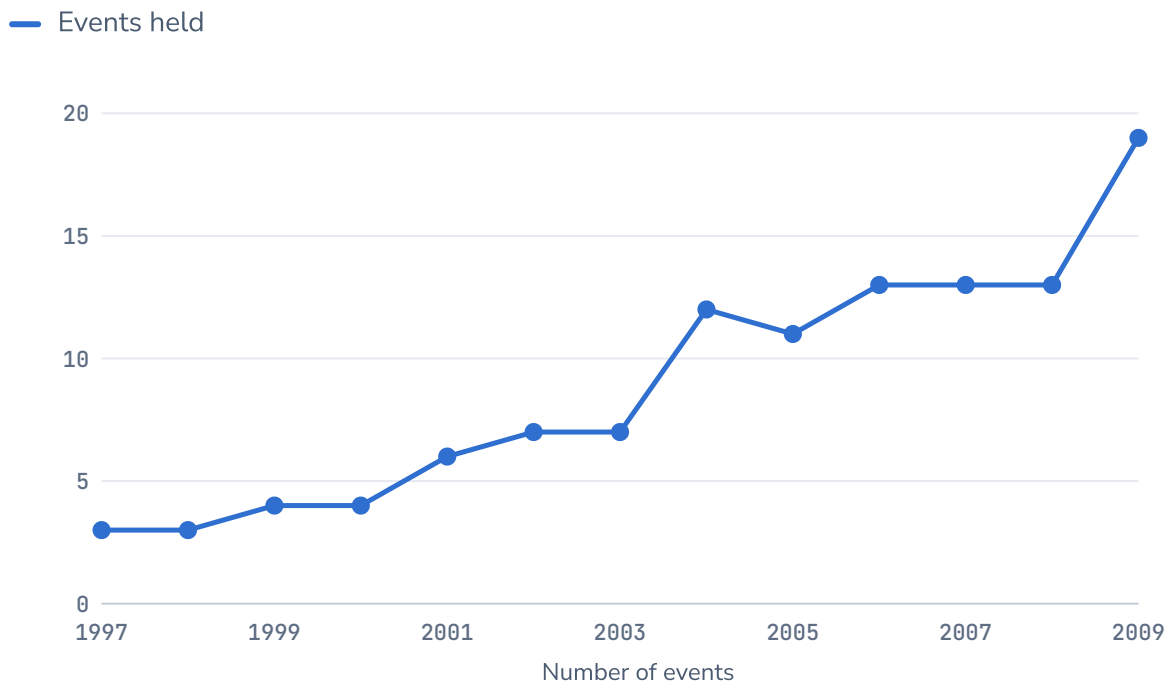
Whole event landscapes shift with power. In the German music industry, events with a conference program rose from three in 1997 to 19 in 2009 as digital distribution disrupted the business[4]. Of 27 events, six defended existing copyright models, eight sought reform, five were radical and eight were neutral, and most new events were reformist or radical[4].

Each event hosted its own coalition. In 2009 press coverage, the established Popkomm fair was mainly associated with conservative claims, the c/o pop festival

with a balanced debate and the only radical voices, and the all2gethernow conference with reform[4]. After Popkomm was cancelled in June 2009, conservative claims dominated the coverage for a time[4].

Number of German music industry events with a conference program from 1997 to 2009

Number of events held per year.



Source: Dobusch & Schüßler · Release date: 2010 · Region: Germany · Period: 1997 to 2009 · Events covered: 27

Emotions and a shared identity

Events also hold power through feeling. Maker Faires in the U.S. are designed to create excitement and inspiration through demonstrations and hands-on experiences, and organizers select exhibitors who can inspire visitors[5]. Attendees came to see makers of math tiles and of hula hoops as members of one inclusive community[5].

The effect shows in coverage. In 2,480 U.S. newspaper articles from 2005 to 2017, stories about the maker movement became more varied as it gained legitimacy, but articles published within 30 days after a Maker Faire used more

similar language[5]. The emotions that align a field's story are double-edged: the same openness that builds legitimacy also widens the stories told about the field[5].

Notes on the data

The figures are based on five studies published between 2010 and 2021: observation of two Israeli biotech conferences and two high-tech conferences, five UN negotiating meetings with 40 interviews, 27 German music events and 80 press claims from 2009, and 2,480 newspaper articles with interviews at Maker Faires[1–5]. The German study is a conference paper based on media coverage. Program shares refer to plenary sessions only.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

1 Gross, T., & Zilber, T. B. (2020). Power Dynamics in Field-Level Events: A Narrative Approach [Journal article]. *Organization Studies, 41(10), 1369–1390*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840620907197 First-hand

2 Zilber, T. B. (2011). Institutional Multiplicity in Practice: A Tale of Two High-Tech Conferences in Israel [Journal article]. *Organization Science, 22(6), 1539–1559*. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0611 First-hand

3 Hardy, C., & Maguire, S. (2010). Discourse, Field-Configuring Events, and Change in Organizations and Institutional Fields: Narratives of DDT and the Stockholm Convention [Journal article]. *Academy of Management Journal, 53(6), 1365–1392*. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2010.57318384 First-hand

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First-hand

The evidence

●●●●● 5 studies

SAMPLE

Five studies: four Israeli technology conferences, five UN negotiating meetings with 40 interviews, 27 German music events with 80 press claims, and 2,480 newspaper articles with interviews at Maker Faires

YEARS

2010–2021

METHOD

Observation and narrative analysis of conferences, discourse analysis of negotiations and press coverage, text analysis of news with interviews

About Eventamin

Eventamin reads the peer-reviewed research on events, exhibitions and hospitality, sets it against industry data and states what it means for the market. Every brief is published by Eventamin as an organisation: its sources, method and corrections are open.

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