

**Shared Knowledge:**

# Hybrid Formats

**IMPAKT Centre for Media Culture**

Utrecht, The Netherlands [impakt.nl](http://impakt.nl)



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Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, IMPAKT has seen an unprecedented boost of creativity from cultural institutions trying to engage their audiences online. Though a challenging time for this field, many lessons were learned and the many benefits of online events were uncovered along the way. With the current COVID reset and the cultural sector getting “back to normal”, institutions and professionals are now facing new challenges as they try to find effective ways to implement the advantages of online events with the familiarity of offline settings in hybrid setups. In the last few years, starting already before the outbreak of COVID, IMPAKT has dedicated resources for the exploration and invention of hybrid event formats that promote an easier, more accessible form of interaction for audiences that join events from different locations.

**IMPAKT**  
**Centre for Media Culture**

In the section “Shared Knowledge” EMAP publishes results from internal conferences and workshops to share them with other cultural organisations and artists. The aim is to exchange and gain know ledge within the sector of media art.

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## Definition of Hybrid: bringing together online and offline

IMPAKT defines “Hybrid” as bringing together audiences and participants online and offline in a shared event, which is experienced equally by all parties. In our experiments, we focus on ways to make this complex interaction between participants that are not in the same sphere (online or in-venue) easy, inspiring, engaging and fun. We approach these experiments and look for ideas and solutions from diverse directions such as technological, sociological, psychological, and more.

## Why Hybrid?

The EMAP network puts at its forefront the importance of creating a network across all its partner institutions from across Europe. In our increasingly digital surroundings, we rely more and more on digital means of communication in order to establish and create such networks that span a whole continent and even go beyond. However, these digital tools often lack the personable qualities we seek when interacting with others. Furthermore, when looking at these communication tools, they tend to offer very basic communication methods. One can hear and see the other online participants, but options for other forms of connections remain out of reach.

Hybrid event formats come to bridge the, sometimes, unfamiliar feeling one gets from remote communication and the need for interpersonal social experiences. For example, hybrid communication formats can facilitate the joint creation of different art projects in an event that brings together artists from different locations. If done well, hybrid events can create an experience that exceeds the physical limitations of audiences existing in different locations and allows for new channels of communication.

In this report, we will share our insights about developing hybrid setups. We will sketch out the challenges and the opportunities this format introduces, provide some useful links and inspiration and end with a case study of a hybrid event IMPAKT organised on November 2022.



## **1. Challenges when setting up a hybrid event**

Perhaps the main question hybrid events raise, is how can we overcome the physical distance and create a sense of intimacy and togetherness. Technological developments have advanced greatly since the beginning of the pandemic and facilitate communication gaps between people online. However, the biggest challenge we must overcome with each hybrid event is that of translating the experience of the in-venue audience to the online audience.

The previous question introduces another pressing matter – how can we keep online audiences active? Be it through the content of the session or by using various communication tools, enticing at-home or offline audiences to maintain an active part in a hybrid event is crucial to its success.

One of the greatest opportunities an online event provides is a broader, more international reach than that of an online event. A crucial topic that must be addressed here is the structural differences between internet users in the Global West, where internet infrastructures are well-developed vs. those in the Global South, specifically in more emerging areas of the world, where the internet connection is slower and not as accessible as for those in the West. By asking participants for a certain internet connection, we limit which participants that can take part in our hybrid event. Therefore, another question that always comes to mind when setting up a hybrid event is that of accessibility – to what degree do we implement software that demand a higher bandwidth from our online participants?

Another difficulty that arises when setting up a hybrid event is that more experts must be included in the preparation process. Here, beyond a curator and producer, an institution must confer with a tech specialist and take into consideration the limitations of technology when planning a hybrid event. This might narrow the event and limit the possibilities for presentation and engagement with the audience.

Finally, an institution must also take into consideration the costs of hybrid events, which tend to be higher than the costs of a “regular” event. Of course, including more team members in the preparation process of such an event adds to its cost but the expenses of software, cameras, microphones and other tools that an institution must acquire to execute a hybrid event, must be taken into account as well.

Though all of these challenges are crucial to consider when planning a hybrid event, it is equally important to explore the many opportunities that this format of events can introduce.



## **2. Opportunities introduced by hybrid events**

As mentioned above, perhaps the main benefit introduced by hybrid events is their accessibility. Through hybrid events, institutions can reach international audiences, introduce a multiplicity of voices and feature international artists, scholars and others that can not travel for various reasons.

By experimenting with hybrid events, institutions develop new technologies and tools for international communication and artistic creation. This is a huge asset that hybrid events bring to the cultural field.

Though listed as a challenge above, team effort can lead to the development of many great ideas. Including experts from different fields in the planning of a hybrid event can result in creating an experience that can resonate with audiences that won't usually attend a cultural event.

After looking into the challenges and opportunities that hybrid event formats introduce, we would like to sketch out a few great examples, projects and further information about various formats of hybrid experiments.

For suggestions on how to set up a hybrid event, including the proper equipment, please refer to the technical setup of the case study presented below.



### 3. Links and information on organisations and projects that practice and promote hybridity

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#### [Tool Kit For The Inbetween](#)

A how-to knowledge base offering tools, frameworks, and inspiration for designing a valuable hybrid experience. The toolkit provides an overview of existing, privacy-friendly platforms and tools for creating hybrid experiences. It also offers practical tips and a vocabulary for how these tools can contribute to an online and onsite audience experience. The toolkit is born out of extensive research into hybrid experiences and their dynamic lineage of experimentation undertaken in the art and cultural sector. The Toolkit for the Inbetween is a partnership between The Hmm, affect lab, and MU Hybrid Art House.

#### [Digital Earth](#)

This organization's mission is to create a planetary movement. Only when this movement is as global and diverse as the users of the technological systems, we can redesign our planet's technological infrastructures. Digital Earth propels systemic change by producing films, campaigns, events and shares the insights of their global community and informs the public. Digital Earth was a research fellowship (2018-2022) for artists thinking through questions of digital futures. The program aimed at diversifying dialogue and debate in society through the power of art to bring about structural social change.

## International Art & Wine Tasting Event

IMPAKT [Centre for Media Culture]

This International Art & Wine Tasting Event was an informal hybrid art event that connected audience members and participants from six European countries across the online/offline divide. This hybrid event took place physically at the picturesque Oud Amelisweerd estate in Utrecht, where five tables were set up. We were joined online by five other tables at the following art organisations: Antre Peaux in Bourges, France; Werkleitz in Halle (Saale), Germany; Onassis Stegi in Athens, Greece; Kontejner in Zagreb, Croatia; and Laboral in Gijón, Spain. We asked each of them to share their favourite local wine, and we tasted and discussed their wine selections with wine experts.

## I want to delete it all, but not now

Roos Groothuizen (2021)

I Want To Delete It All, But Not Now is an unsolvable escape room that challenges our personal motives for escaping the data industry. The artist set up a physical 'room' in Tetem, where physical visitors could enter it for 60 minutes to find clues on the disappearance of a fictional person. At the same time, online players could observe the space through the camera that the physical players wore on their bodies. Both sides would cooperate to solve physical and digital puzzles that challenged them to search for the origins of their own digital dilemmas about online addiction, privacy, and responsibility.

## HEALING

denialofservice.fail

In a run of HEALING, half of the players participate live on-site. Awaiting them there is a multi-storied venue, combining the barren charms of a mental institution with the pulsating aesthetics of game shows. In this immersive play world, there is always something to be discovered. Weird figures and their stories, an elaborate technical surveillance apparatus, and futuristic greenhouses. In cooperation with professional performers, the players themselves bring this fictional entertainment show to full life. The other half of the audience is playing online – they are the TRIBUNAL. Through a custom-built 3D-game-environment, they are able to follow, access, and control the proceedings via video, voice, and text chat and can observe everything via the in-house surveillance system. Their task is to control and evaluate the other players – but everyone has their own secret agendas as well. Careful: even the TRIBUNAL is constantly being evaluated and controlled.



## Unboxing Past

Helgard Haug / Rimini Protokoll (2020-present)

Accompanied by three cameras, archaeologist Dr. Thorsten Sonnemann started in mid-2020 in a specially designed room to open the archive boxes and systematically record the contents. He spent almost a year opening the boxes and measuring, numbering, photographing, looking at, analyzing and making an inventory of the stones, tiles, shards, utensils and everyday objects, as well as parts of the brutally destroyed Torah ark. With his work, he contributes to making the contents of all 105 archive boxes digitally accessible. So you can observe for many hours what otherwise only takes place in secret: Unboxing Past not only shows how the finds themselves come to light again. For the first time, it is also shown in great detail how the archaeologist handles the finds. The online audience can meet up for a 2-hour online conversation in groups of three, look at one of the archive boxes, and exchange ideas about what and how they remember and what that means for the finds in the Börneplatz synagogue. At the end of the conversation, they decide whether their conversation will be made available on the website.



## 4. A case study: Hybrid formats, merging online and offline

On Friday, 4 November 2022, IMPAKT [Centre for Media Culture] hosted an EMAP capacity-building workshop focused on the production and development of hybrid event formats. This workshop was part of the Professionals Programme of the IMPAKT Festival 2022.

### Content of session

In this collaborative session, we showcased the latest steps IMPAKT has made toward developing successful hybrid formats and focused on the knowledge of different artists and organisers who work on and with hybrid formats. For this discussion, we focused on the technical aspects of facilitating such events, as well as the sociological and psychological aspects of hybridity. Each participant in this session engages with hybridity differently and even has distinct views on what hybridity means.

### The participants in this session:

- Moderators: **Marijke Hessels** (tech-dramaturg at Ulrike Quade Company) and **Arjon Dunnewind** (General director IMPAKT)
- **Patricia Villanueva** (Laboral Centro de Arte, Gijón)
- **Heracles Papatheodorou** (Onassis Stegi, Athens)
- **Sandra Sterle** (Kontejner, Zagreb)
- **Sander Veenhof**, **Angelique Spaninks** and **Babusi Nyoni** (METAVERSE CHA-CHA-CHA dance party)
- Artist **Benjamin Pompe**
- Artist **Casper de Jong**

Through various views and experience working with hybrid event formats, the session aimed to give an overview of current hybrid experiments that different institutions and/or artists are currently engaging in. At the beginning of the session, each participant shared their work. After all the participants presented, we opened the discussion to a broader audience, allowing for questions and remarks from both our online and in-venue participants.

### Cases/inspiration for hybrid events:

- [International Art & Wine Tasting Event](#)  
International Hybrid Wine Tasting Event: This event is described above, under the section “Links And Information On Organisations That Practice And Promote Hybridity”.
- [Metaverses CHA-CHA-CHA dance party](#)  
The metaverse, often described as ‘persistent, shared, 3D virtual spaces’, doesn’t yet exist, but that hasn’t stopped big companies from capitalising on it. It’s this moment when the metaverse is coming into being, that opens up space for us to bring in our ideas of the metaverse and shape our own ‘metaverses’. During the METAVERSES CHA-CHA-CHA dance party, participants danced into a new reality. Sander Veenhof presented three of his latest hybrid AR experiments and creative coder Babusi Nyoni was the architect of our dancing metaverses. This experimental event and workshop series was part of the Toolkit for the Inbetween, a research project and how-to knowledge base offering tools, frameworks, and inspiration for designing a successful hybrid experience where online and on-site audiences come together. The Toolkit for the Inbetween is a partnership between The Hmm, affect lab, and MU.
- [Benjamin Pompe and Casper de Jong](#),  
two emerging artists working at the border between online and offline, shared their experience of working at this intricate interface.

### Hybrid Technical Setup

In the IMPAKT Festival 2022 Professionals’ Programme, we wanted to look closer at hybridity. Throughout our previous hybrid experiments, we sought to create formats that establish a pleasant, casual and inspiring interaction between the online and offline audiences. For this session, the challenge was translating a panel structure into a new and engaging hybrid format. Panels usually provide a somewhat passive experience for their audience. There is a clear distinction between the speaker and the listener. The gap in the level of participation may lead to disengagement from the online audience, as they are the least active in this event.

The technical setup played a critical part in the session and enabled its hybrid component. This is the setup sent to our technical producer:

## Room arrangement

The room arrangement was a square of tables. On one side the hosts, Arjon and Marijke, sat. At the other tables were the session's in-house participants. Right in the centre of the square was a tripod with a webcam on all sides, facing the four sides of the square, each connected to a laptop. On the floor on all four sides, directly in front of the webcam tripod, were four screens of about 40" on a floor stand, each aimed at the side of the table they are in front of (on these, the inhouse participants could see all the zoom participants). These screens were all connected to the same laptop, to which the webcam is connected.

## Audio

On each side of the square, there was a podcast microphone with the omni setting turned on (note that these have USB outputs and are rather short cables). This allowed all participants on one side of the table to be heard clearly. These were connected to the central direction device.

## Zoom session

A session was created on a paid Zoom account. Everyone was asked to turn on their videos. The central device is where hosting took place and the appropriate participants were spotlighted, muted and asked to unmute. Depending on the programme, it may also be the case that the camera is switched off for participants who do not get the virtual video going.

## Materials

### Video

- 4 webcam Logitech C920 HD Pro Webcams
- 1 tripod
- 1 cabling from the four webcams to the laptops
- 1 mounting of four webcams to the tripod
- 4 × 40" screens
- 4 HDMI cables 10 metres

### Audio

- 4 table microphones: Boya BY-PM700
- 1 cabling and any adapters for the four microphones
- 1 set of speakers and minijack connection for central device
- 4 laptops, with HDMI and USB connection
- 1 central device



## 5. Conclusion

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Throughout our various hybrid experiments, we have gained valuable knowledge on holding successful hybrid events. For the session presented above, IMPAKT implemented some of our acquired knowledge from previous events, extended the experiment to try a new setup and gained new insights. One observation we made during this event is the importance of keeping hybrid sessions personal by making everyone a participant. This ensures that people are eager to participate as everyone is considered a stakeholder. This is imperative to maintaining active sessions such as workshops or hackathons but proved to be a challenge when translating a panel, a normally passive session, into a hybrid format. Through the active participation not only of the speakers but also the audience in this session, we learned that the smaller the distinctions are between the people involved (participant, visitor, organiser, guest, listener, speaker), the easier it is to have people interact and become active contributors.

On a more general note, hybrid event formats offer great opportunities for cultural institutions to reach a broader audience. Furthermore, this communication approach offers a creative breeding ground for cultural exchanges and creations by connecting people from different locations and encouraging them to use technology in a new way. At IMPAKT, we refer to our hybrid events as 'experiments' as a way to consider the many developments this format needs to undergo in order to be fully accessible and useable. That being said, we already acknowledge and appreciate the immense value that hybridity has to offer for cultural exchanges and technological development.

## **European Media Art Platform**

The European Media Art Platform (EMAP), initiated by werkleitz and co-funded by Creative Europe since 2018, is a consortium of leading European media art organisations specialised in Digital and Media Art, Bio Art and Robotic Art.

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