



Collage by Leo Sauermann

Spark 2015 in Austria

11-14 June

AfterBurn Report

Summary

“Spark” was a multi-day outdoor Burning Man community event from **Thursday 11th to Sunday 14th June**. Its **location** was “**Seedcamp**”, a valley with a mill, a spring, meadows, and woods situated in **Kautzen** in Austria, located between Vienna, Prague and Munich. Owned by a family, this has been the place of many alternative music & art festivals.

The **concept** was to gather at this new location and enable the Burning Man community to have a burning weekend there together - to **ignite a “Spark”** that may **turn into a Burn** in the future. We gathered an organizing team and based on our experience and the available time we decided to cap the event at 149 participants - to play it safe. **108 tickets** were sold, a little bit more people were on site.

Interactive art **sculptures** were created for the event and exhibited, ranging from small light installations to large climbable structures. Participants built multiple **theme camps** with differing topics. An intense lineup of **workshops** was held. Live **music** artists and DJs performed. A safe atmosphere to experiment was created.

We plan to repeat it.

Leo Sauermann, Austrian Burners Association.



photo by Martin Strak

Art and Performance

The **art theme** was “**Carnival of Errors**”¹. This theme is to express that “Spark” is a first-time experiment and that people should aim for greatness and, if necessary, fail elegantly. The “scientific method” is also an inspiration for the art theme: do an experiment, validate or fail your hypothesis, iterate to improve. This poem nails it:

The road to wisdom?—Well, it's plain and simple to express:
Err
and err
and err again,
but less
and less
and less.
— Piet Hein

From the budget, a pot for art grants was reserved to support material costs. Altogether we had **18 submissions for art projects and workshops** before the event and several spontaneous art projects popping up on site. 5 of the submitted projects asked for an art grant. There was a strong submission of workshops and interactive art, substantially less live music.

An interesting aspect was that for several projects the participation at “**Spark**” was a test-drive for their projects: Thatsookay’s **Caleidoscow**, Mephy’s **LED Dome** and Dawn’s “**Tower**” were featured later on **Nowhere** and/or **BurningMan in BRC**. Some artists noted that the test drive was excellent to try out the electronics and test hacked devices. To support artists attending both events, we ran a questionnaire and asked if artists would benefit if we organized a transport of their artwork from Spark to Nowhere, but no one needed it this year.

¹ We were pleased that, after we decided on the “Carnival of Errors” theme in January 2015, that the BurningMan in BRC later announced their “Carnival of Mirrors” theme. Well on spot. First! Ha!

On site, several art projects were created out of the spirit that had taken the place. There were both well-prepared theater workshops and performances and spontaneous theater emerging out of situations and in interaction with sculptures.

Leo Sauermann on a distinctive scene:

My camp came with a pirate ship, the “Miss Inspiration”. We thought we were pirates. But little did we know - we were met by another camp which behaved as pirates and were - conveniently - already fully dressed as pirates. Compared to us, even though we had a ship, they were the “true pirates”. They spontaneously started building gas-powered cannons out of trash with the clear plan to attack our ship (“pretty safe” and “cool” according to our mutual safety check and fraternising). Meanwhile, a third camp built a heated mud-bath on site, where anyone could enjoy a proper warm mud-bath.

This climaxed in the following scene on the final day of Spark: the crew of true pirates was launching a surprise attack on our pirate ship! We were defenseless, as we were just striking down, all our equipment spread on site, half our ship already gone. The attackers were using cannons and a water-balloon slingshot for long-range bombardment. Curses of damnation were met with commands to “load the cannons”. Everyone on this part of the site was curious how this would end.

Out of the blue, a dire group of naked, wet-mud-covered hippies emerged from the mud-bath of mudder-camp. Armed with sticks and stones. The mudders made attempts to hug the attacking pirates. Faced by the threat to be hugged by wet & muddy hippies, the attackers ran away. The day was saved.

The battle became an often-repeated tale in the lore of Spark. It reminded me strongly of the “Bunnies vs. Carrots” theme or “Artists vs. EDM” known from the Burn in BRC.



Organization & Community Engagement

How Spark came to be:

Leo Sauermann: I always wanted a Burn within driving distance of Vienna, to be able to bring art there. To make this happen, I was co-organizing Burning-Man inspired events starting 2011 and stepped up as one of four Regional Contacts. The idea for Spark emerged in 2014 when I met Stefan Stein, member of the Stein family who manages the "Seedcamp" location in Kautzen. I learned that he "always wanted to go to Burning Man". As he wanted to go to Burning Man, why not bring Burning Man to him?

The Austrian Burners Association, the legal body founded first for Vienna Burning Ball (but designed to enable more) took legal ownership and responsibility for the event.

The **core team** for Spark is rooted in the the **Vienna Burning Ball (VBB)**. Leo Sauermann, part of the VBB team, took lead for Spark. Madlen Abdallah and Gogo Bernhard from the VBB team also joined. Leo got in touch with Misa Rygrova (RC from Prague), Mephy P. Kling (RC from Munich), Ray "Rhino" Ruppaner (RC from Linz) and informed them "that there may be a chance to have a central-european Burn" and kept them updated. Volker Kieslinger (RC from Graz, organizes Mindburn.at in Styria) was included in the planning early on. First meetings between Stefan and Edi Stein (from the location), Flo Tuner (trashbar.org) and Leo Sauermann in September 2014 set an initial concept. This was followed by a meeting on site in November 2014, where Munich Burners and Vienna Burners met. Another organisational meeting during the after hour of the Vienna Burning Ball in January 2015 drew in more people. The event was presented at the Regional Leadership Summit in Amsterdam 2015. Around then Holger Wessels (RC from Berlin) joined the organising team. Burners who previously volunteered at VBB or at "Magic Garden" (a one-time Burner Gathering in Vienna in 2014) stepped up to take lead roles: Alexander "Alfinator" Minich, Ewa Sklodowska, Max Ledworowski, Verena Ganzert. Reini Kastner from the Seedcamp community also joined the orga team, deepening the ties between the communities.

So most of the team knew each other from various regional Burns and parties, but this was the first time everyone worked together in this constellation. That means that some organizers didn't know everyone and met for the first time at Spark, which was the source of much joy ("new friends!") and confusion ("who the fuck are you? Ah!").

Public Communication. The **invitation to participate** was communicated in the European Burning Man Facebook groups, mailing lists, to participants of our previous events (VBB, Magic Garde), to participants of TreeOfLife/Seedcamp (the event traditionally taking place in Kautzen a week before Spark), and to friends in our network.

Community at the event

The participants took this initiative and lived up to their best: the **location** was occupied by participants and thoroughly **transformed** into a place where the **Burning Man principles were alive**. Our delight was that the participants created an atmosphere of respect, freedom, and artistic expression. People started decorating and transforming the place without being told to do so and while doing so, respected the location and left no trace. Burners stood up when Gate shifts needed to be filled. First-time participants were teamed up with experienced greeters in gate teams to get into volunteering. The experienced core organizers held everything together. People donated their time and resources when needed.



A small team of orgas and friends arrived Tuesday and started building up their camp and their art, most participants arrived on Thursday and Friday. Some people just showed up for Saturday and Sunday.

Live performances were done on multiple stages, we had one big sound system brought by Gogo from the Vienna Burners. The main outdoor stage is a fixed stage and provides space for live bands and for workshops or other performances. We moved the sound system from the main outdoor stage to the main indoor stage. Another sound system was available within the "Miss Inspiration" pirate ship and the ship also featured an elevated stage and a hookup point for aerial performers. DJs and live acts performed on all stages.



Location

Since about the year 2000, Seedcamp has been the location of yearly counter-culture festivals for up to 2000 participants (primarily, the annual “Tree of Life” festival). Stefan and Eduard Stein, who manage Seedcamp, are experienced counter-culture event organizers and deeply rooted in the alternative festival community. They create an atmosphere of acceptance, participation, and artistic freedom.

The Seedcamp location in Kautzen lends itself to host a Burn: it is in central Europe, between Vienna, Munich, and Prague. The people already connected to the space are cultural enablers.

As for **infrastructure**: the location already has 2 fixed buildings, electric power, 4 toilets, showers, a fully equipped kitchen and a large event room. Also, there are about 4 rooms with a total of 20 bunk beds which can be used by participants who don't want to camp.

Artists participating in previous events transformed the Seedcamp in Kautzen into a magic place. They built an outdoor stage, a “front of house” hut for sound and light mixing, sheds, bars, huts, tree houses, an outdoor kitchen, bridges, These structures can be used but also have to be maintained and improved. This is another key for the possibility to gather as a Burner Community at Seedcamp: we are allowed to improve and evolve the infrastructure at the place and thereby gift to it..



There are multiple interconnected **meadows**. We dedicated each meadow. “Feenwiese” was for **theme camps and art**, “Agora” for **sound performances and art**, one for more theme camps, and one for **parking**. We intentionally did not separate theme camps from “free camping” and instead intermixed both. We allowed theme camps to park cars/vans or RVs within their camp (when pre-announced, policy: park and stay, no unnecessary driving during the festival).

One large meadow “**Feenwiese**” was the primary place used for theme camps. The camps were arranged on the rim of the meadow, leaving the center open as agora and as exhibition area. A 13-meter pirate ship art sculpture was the center of the meadow. As it was only about 130 people, the “clever” city planning was barely visible, but the thinking behind proved right: intermix free camping with theme camps, allow people to bring their big shit using vans/cars and park their cars within theme camps - all this helped to create a “village” atmosphere.



We provided **electricity** to the camps. Our rule was: every camp in need of electricity needs to bring 30 meter IP44 cable and multiple outlets, to be able to plug yourself into a grid and let the next camp plug itself into your power outlet. This worked well most of the time. Some non-IP44 cables made it into the grid. Multiple camps were plugged in serially. During a thunderstorm on Friday and Saturday, non-IP44 cables went wet and we had power outages and needed to replace non-IP44 equipment with proper equipment. Lessons were learned.

We also had to provide minimal lightning of the pathways at night for security reasons.

The experienced burners brought their camps including art, lights, beer, etc. Virgin participants came well equipped with camping equipment and got the inspiration to “add lights!” for upcoming events. Cooking was done by participants either in their camp or in a communal kitchen. A team additionally organized meals for volunteers on shift and organizers.





A couple more than 108 participants

- Altogether, 108 Tickets were sold.
- On site, the people running the location were present and a couple of participants of the previous festival (Tree Of Life), which took place the week before Spark. Some of these paid the entrance fee and were properly greeted, some evaded buying a ticket.
- A few (3-10) hikers from surrounding villages walked through the festival (if possible, they were greeted, but no ticket fee was collected from them).
- About 130 people participated altogether.

The ticket sales “shipping country” indicates that participants came from the following countries:

Austria	56
Germany	18
Czech Republic	3
Spain	2
Netherlands	1
Switzerland	1
Denmark	1
Ireland	1

We believe that at least one additional participant came from the UK.

Budget, Ticket Sales

The **Budget** was calculated based on: the cost of the **location**, a small but decisive amount for **art grants**, enough money to organize the most basic **infrastructure** (power, communication),

food for volunteers, the need to **keep ticket prices low** to allow everyone who wants to come to participate and not make the ticket price a show-stopper.

We ended up with

- a regular price of 35€,
- low-income tickets for 20€,
- art-sponsor tickets aimed at people who want to donate extra for 50€,
- and an optional “+5€” fee for participants who wanted one of 20 available bunk beds.

We used Brown Paper Tickets as a ticketing company. Their service is fine but it lacks the option to pay via bank transfer, a popular payment type in the German-Speaking countries where many people do not have a credit card. Also, some bulk tickets we ordered at BrownPaperTickets came weeks after we ordered them, which threw us back in pre-sales. We are looking for an alternative to BrownPaperTickets that allows payment using bank transfer.

The Austrian Burners Association decided to invest savings into the production of Spark. There was a surplus left from Vienna Burning Ball 2015.

- We budgeted to invest 512,80€ of our saved money to support art and equipment.
- The ticket revenue was 3877,80€.
- Altogether, the planned production budget was 3877,80€.
- Expenses were altogether 3832,26 €.
- We were 45,54€ below production budget.

Cost for the location was 15€ per participant plus a small overhead for electricity and gas coming to a total of 1710€. This cost grew variable with ticket sales, so budgeting was possible even though ticket sale wasn't finished. Having a variable cost for the location was offered by Seedcamp to enable us to be flexible and reduce our risk if we had only low ticket sales.

There were dedicated budgets which were managed by the respective team leads. Support for “art grants” and support for transporting art and equipment (“mover”) were two other major budget items/teams needing resources. Buying walkie-talkies was also a high cost. All three budget positions were intentionally backed by the Austrian Burners Association using funds left from VBB because all three teams/budgets contribute essentially to the community and the experience.

The expenses of the builder team (“bob the builder”, “power rangers”) were not claimed by the team lead this year. We decided to close the budget and allow the lead to hand in these invoices at later events for claiming, thus the real expenses were higher than reflected in the final budget.

A donation of 10€ for BurningMan.org is in the budget (but wasn't transferred as of the time of writing, still on our todo list).

For the Austrian Burners Association, the resulting **net investment (loss) to produce Spark was 473,26€**. This loss was planned in the budget and is covered by the surplus left from 2015 Vienna Burning Ball (VBB).

Here are the budget details:

Revenues	Art-Donation by Burners.at	300,00 €
	Walkie-Talkie Donation by Burners.at	212,80 €
	Ticket Sales	3.365,00 €
		3.877,80 €
<hr/>		
Expenses	Seedcamping for People	1.620,00 €
	Seedcamping Power & Gas	90,00 €
	Insurance & Event Legaleze (3)	455,46 €
	Art Grants (2)	503,34 €
	Bracelets	32,00 €
	Jukeboxer (Music Equipment)	100,00 €
	Walkie-Talkies	312,80 €
	Mover	543,31 €
	Food Costs for Volunteers	127,55 €
	Miscellaneous	37,80 €
	Donation to Black Rock Arts	10,00 €
		3.832,26 €

Weather

Temperature was chilly at night (10-16° Celsius) and sunny during the day (30° Celsius). The sunny weather created a relaxed and nice atmosphere from Tuesday to Friday.

We had a rainstorm on Saturday which drove many participants into the 2 buildings and surrounding shade structures. Also, the storm “sank” the Burn and closing ceremony we had planned for Saturday. We also experienced power outages as some of our electrical equipment was not fully waterproof and needed to be replaced during the storm.

On Sunday, weather was sunny again in the morning, with a short burst of rain in the afternoon. Teardown needed to be sped up as the rain was threatening to wet tents and equipment.

Summary: Sunny with an occasional thunderstorm.

Working with the Authorities, Legal Body

This was our first time to work with authorities as Burning Man Event organizers. Thankfully, Stefan and Edi Stein, who organize Seedcamp and TreeOfLife festival, guided us. They have been running festivals since around 2000 and have established a working ground with the authorities.

The Austrian Burners Association was the legal body running the event. The event was officially registered at the major office of Kautzen and got an official permit. The office gave out several restrictions we had to conform to. There was also a fire inspection and we rented fire extinguishers. We also booked a liability insurance.

Are we going to repeat this?

We ignited a Spark and experienced a Burn. We would love to repeat this event in 2016 and grow it. We are looking for people who want to take lead roles or join the team as co-leads.

You can reach us at www.burners.at

Thank you for doing this!

- Alexander "Alfinator" Minich: food for volunteers
- Eduard Stein, Seedcamp.at: co-manager of the location
- Ewa Sklodowska: co-lead art, co-lead food for volunteers
- Gogo Bernhard, burners.at, RC: music
- Holger "Owl" Wessels, Berlin RC: logistics and transport
- Leo Sauermann, Burners.at, RC: production, gate, communication
- Madlen Abdallah, Burners.at: finances, art
- Max Ledworowski: building, electricity
- Rainer "Ray" Ruppaner, RC: rangers, security
- Reini Kastner: placement, electricity
- Stefan Stein, Seedcamp.at: manager of the location, contact to authorities
- Verena Ganzert: volunteers
- Volker Kieslinger, Mindburn.at, RC: kitchen rules

A big thanks to **Stefan and Eduard Stein** of Seedcamp, who believed in our vision, provided the location, and supported the Burning Man community tremendously with time, experience, and a magic space to gather.

I thank you all for dedicating your time and energy for our community. We created a space where the Burning Man community thrived. We did this excellently and we can be proud and happy about the results.

dusty hugs,
Leo "Leobard" Sauermann,

Production lead Spark 2015
Co-Regional Contact Vienna/Austria
Team Member of Vienna Burning Ball