

My #YML21 Conference Impressions

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Years ago, when I first started working for the Research Platform #YouthMediaLife as a student assistant I remember that there was already the aim to organize an international conference. The original plan, of course, was to host this conference onsite, at the University of Vienna, and the preparations for such an onsite conference were in full swing. From booking venues to picking out slipcovers for high tables and finding the perfect catering – we were right on track! Then COVID hit. What we knew about the virus, as well as the rules & regulations seemed to shift constantly - so we, too, had to change plans several times but in the end committed to organising an

Online Conference. This meant that we had to look at our event in a completely new light. It meant finding ways of translating everything we had wanted our face-to-face conference to do into a digital format. Around the same time many conferences were postponed indefinitely or even cancelled and I am so glad the heads of our platform decided that we wouldn't do this, and that while the circumstances were far from ideal, we would make sure that this conference would still be the best possible experience for everybody involved

Until we can meet IRL (which I for one am really looking forward to!). All that is to say that I am very proud we persevered and if there are two things I learned from my work as part of the organisational committee, it's that sometimes very basic pieces of folk wisdom are also the most effective keys to success. Firstly:

Teamwork makes the dream work. I have to say we were a group of people that worked together incredibly well, which I think partly is owed to the communication culture that was established. But it is also down to the fact that I think we all cared a tremendous amount – everyone from the dedicated organisational committee (Susanne, Ute, Cornelia, Lisza & myself) to our fantastic IT-Team (Philipp & Michaela), our social media team (Lisza & Amadea) & our diligent student helpers, everyone, (I mean really everyone!) wanted to see this event become a success and was willing to put in the hours to make that goal become a reality. Luckily,

Hard work pays off. And here I don't just want to acknowledge our own work but highlight that of our presenters as well: I was overwhelmed by the number of fascinating abstracts we received. The work that went into preparing their talks, slides & recordings, as well as the readiness to adjust their contributions for an online event mustn't be taken for granted and truly made the conference the enjoyable experience it was. Speaking of enjoyable experience: From the start it was clear that we didn't want this to be a purely academic endeavour. We wanted plenty of opportunities for socialisation in fun and relaxed settings. To that end we found four fantastic

Musical guests from completely different musical genres, namely "Hearts Hearts", "wienerzucker", "Birgit Denk & Band" and "Anna Kos & Band", who each recorded an exclusive virtual concert for one of our social events to make each of those occasions extra special & provide the atmosphere needed for unwinding after a tightly-packed day of online sessions on

EventMobi, our conference platform. This platform was chosen after a lot of careful research (especially by Cornelia!) to be the virtual "home" of our event. It was then brilliantly furnished by Philipp to provide everything the heads of our research platform had envisioned. Among those ideas was the central goal of supplying plenty of different modes & opportunities for exchange and

Discussion. I myself did a presentation at our conference and benefited first-hand from the many insightful questions and reflective comments posed to me by my colleagues over either video-chat, written chat and even the private messaging function. I thoroughly enjoyed every conversation and (especially as a young researcher just starting out with her own PhD project) it was very exciting to form both national and

International connections. From the Philippines to Germany to South Africa and America. From Israel to the UK and Hong Kong over to Switzerland and Sweden: I absolutely loved the world-wide engagement with our conference! And with all the downsides to hosting an event in the middle of a pandemic, at least there were no missed flights or jet-lags for our international guests, who we still wanted to treat to some

Austrian Flair, without them having to leave their very own offices or homes. Katie Reschenhofer produced the hilariously informative videos on the Viennese Sausage Stand and Coffeehouse Culture. In addition, our platform heads incorporated German and Viennese dialect into their moderation throughout the conference combining them with the conference's primary language English, a sort of

Lingua franca with a twist, which I really enjoyed and which, by the way, is quite an accurate representation of the languages utilized within our platform at the University of Vienna. #YouthMediaLife is an

Interdisciplinary research platform: as such it was very rewarding to see papers from an extraordinarily diverse range of fields, each of which bringing different frameworks and approaches to the table and contributing to real dialogue between disciplines. To facilitate this dialogue and keep a conference day that went from 10:30 to 7 or 8 pm interesting, it was important to us to provide

Format variety in our programme. We featured a mixture of Individual papers, Panels, Workshops and Pre-recorded Presentations on every conference day as well as, of course, our

Esteemed plenary speakers: We were very fortunate to have Rodney Jones, Dafna Lemish, Axel Krommer and Susanne Baumgartner deliver their fantastic keynotes on each day of our event. I truly think there was something for everybody! All that is left for me to do is conclude my impressions of one of the most rewarding experiences of my career with a little “numbers-association” exercise:

2 as in “2 metres distance please!” and the great lengths we went to (mask wearing, self-testing, disinfecting.....), to ensure that we were all staying healthy and safe

0 Days without excitement —not a single, boring second!

223 Attendees whose engagement and participation made #YML21 a joy to be a part of, and finally....

1 second of complete silence after Susanne Reichl & Ute Smit finished their closing speech, the window of the last Zoom call disappeared, and then — a massive round of applause and whooping among all the staff in the room: WE DID IT!