



## From the face-to-face to the hybrid event. Experiences with the transformation of a conference series to online network research

T. Köhler<sup>1</sup>, E. Schoop<sup>2</sup>, N. Filz<sup>3</sup>, N. Kahnwald<sup>4</sup>, R. Sonntag<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chair of Educational Technology, Faculty of Education, TU Dresden

<sup>2</sup> Chair of Information Systems - Information Management, Faculty of Economics, TU Dresden

<sup>3</sup> Media Centre, TU Dresden

<sup>4</sup> Professorship of Knowledge and Information Management, DGVU University of Applied Sciences (HGU), Bad Hersfeld

<sup>5</sup> Professorship of Marketing, especially Multimedia Marketing, Faculty of Economics, HTW Dresden

### Abstract

GeNeMe steht seit mehr als 20 Jahren für „Gemeinschaften in Neuen Medien“ und behandelt Online Communities an der Schnittstelle zwischen bzw. aus Sicht mehrerer Fachdisziplinen wie Informatik, Medientechnologie, Wirtschaftswissenschaft, Bildungs- und Informationswissenschaft sowie Sozial- und Kommunikationswissenschaft. 2020 haben sich die Autor:innen in ihrer Funktion als Ausrichter der Konferenz bewusst für den Fokus des Transfers bzw. Zusammenspiels von hybriden Realitäten zu hybriden Gemeinschaften entschieden. Überraschenderweise führte dies zu einem sprunghaften Anstieg der Beitragseinreichungen um ca. 80%. Der Aufsatz beschreibt, welche Erfahrungen mit der Transformation der Konferenzreihe zur Online-Netzwerkforschung, ausgerichtet durch mehrere Hochschulen am (virtuell-hybriden) Standort Dresden, die Autor:innen dabei gesammelt haben und macht Vorschläge, wie diese für die akademische Lehre verallgemeinert werden können.

GeNeMe has stood for "Communities in New Media" for more than 20 years and deals with online communities at the interface between or from the perspective of several disciplines such as computer science, media technology, economics, education and information science as well as social and communication science. 2020, the authors, in their capacity as conference organisers, deliberately chose to focus on the transfer or interplay of hybrid realities to hybrid communities. Surprisingly, this led to a jump in paper submissions of about 80%.

The paper describes the experience the authors have gained with the transformation of the conference series on online network research, hosted by several universities at the (virtual-hybrid) location of Dresden, and makes suggestions on how this can be generalised for academic teaching.

\*Corresponding author: [Thomas.Koehler@tu-dresden.de](mailto:Thomas.Koehler@tu-dresden.de)

This article was originally submitted in German.

## 1. General

GeNeMe<sup>1</sup> has stood for "Communities in New Media" for more than 20 years and deals with online communities at the interface between or from the perspective of several disciplines such as computer science, media technology, economics, education and information science as well as social and communication science. As the forum for interdisciplinary dialogue between science, business and administration, the conference has facilitated the exchange of experience and knowledge between participants from a wide range of disciplines, organisations and institutions for 23 years now. A comprehensive thematic overview of the conference topics and their changes over time is provided by Köhler et al [1].

Not only since the pandemic, but since the beginning of the conference series in 1998, the focus has continuously been on the scientific and application-related analysis of media-supported cooperation. The discussion and testing of education-related formats of knowledge cooperation has always been a focal point. In 2020, the organisers deliberately chose to focus on the transfer or interplay of hybrid realities to hybrid communities. Surprisingly, this led to a jump in the number of submissions to about 80 % to about 90 contributions - although the causality is unclear.

In the following, we want to examine what experiences the authors have had with the transformation of the conference series on online network research, organised by several universities at the (virtual-hybrid) location of Dresden. In this way, the article can be connected to current studies on the possibilities of digitally supported, cross-university cooperation in teaching. [2], [3]

## 2. Conference schedule, venue and programme information

The programme of GeNeMe 2020 [4] was diverse, including a one-day pre-conference and a two-day main conference.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.geneme.de>

<sup>2</sup> <https://lineupr.com/de>

<sup>3</sup> <https://geneme.lineupr.com/>

As in previous years, the event app LineUpr<sup>2</sup> was used to visualise the programme structure. All information on times, rooms and speakers can be found in the programme app for speakers, participants and other interested parties. Here, conference visitors have the opportunity to compile their own individual programme plan and can use it on their smartphone or PC in a responsive design to accompany the conference<sup>3</sup>.

The 23rd annual conference started on 7 October 2020 with a pre-conference in the form of a virtual bar camp on Open Science.<sup>4</sup> Although about 2/3 of the main conference is held in German, the barcamp, which was organised in cooperation with the Leibniz Research Network "Open Science"<sup>5</sup>, was able to address an entirely English-speaking clientele.

On the afternoon of the pre-conference, interested parties from education, politics and science were invited to join the opening event at the HTW Dresden face-to-face. Here, the exchange of experiences was implemented in the form of a world café. In total, there were about 50 online participants in the barcamp and about 40 face-to-face participants at the pre-conference.

The main conference took place in the following days from 8 to 9 October in the DGUV Congress Centre in Dresden. The conference was held in a hybrid format in 2 workshop rooms plus a foyer and catering area for the breaks, with a maximum of 50 participants on site at any one time. The DGUV Conference Centre offered sufficient space for the conference to be held in the presence of the participants at this location - taking into account the specially developed safety concept.

## 3. The hybrid implementation

Since the call for papers was already written during the (first) lockdown, it was clear from the beginning that only a hybrid, extremely flexible concept would make it possible to hold the conference in autumn 2020. At least the organisation team and the conference manage-

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.open-science-conference.eu/barcamp/os-cigeneme>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.leibniz-openscience.de/>

ment should be able to meet in the rooms on site, and in addition the conference should take place completely online if necessary. Against the background of the accommodation bans imposed directly before the start of the conference and rising infection figures, this flexible concept proved its worth, as every participant could switch between online and presence participation at any time.

MS Teams was chosen as the platform for the implementation; the audio-visual presentation and transmission technology on site was set up and supported by a service provider. Only through this support was it possible for the moderators on site to moderate "in the room" for the presence participants, but at the same time the sessions could also be followed online in MS Teams. In addition, the above-mentioned conference app LineUpR was used to plan the individual conference programme during the conference.<sup>6</sup>

During the main conference, moderation by alternating experts took place continuously on site. Due to the pandemic situation, the two days were characterised by the unpredictable presence of contributors and participants.

In total, there were about 40 face-to-face participants and 60 online participants at the main conference. However, "mixed forms" were practised, either by changing the place of participation during the two days, but also by online dial-in to the parallel session from a presence setting. Important for the possibility of such a dynamic change was the continuous online support, which included all contributions and sessions.

#### 4. Conference didactics

Since the conference is also a testing ground for innovative approaches to conference didactics, newly configured handouts are available for the preparation and implementation of the hybrid conference for presentation and moderation (these can be accessed online via the embedded links):

#### A) [Conference didactics for the presentation](#)

In order to do justice to the large number of contributions, the following times resulted according to the submitted format:

1. Research contributions: 20 minutes (10 min. input + 10 min. discussion)
2. Practical and student contributions: 10 minutes (7 min. input + 3 min. discussion)
3. Interactive contributions: 40 minutes

#### B) [Conference didactics for moderation](#)

Facilitators were responsible for opening and guiding the sessions during the GeNeMe conference. As these took place both in presence and online via Microsoft Teams, personalised access was provided after registration for the conference. During the sessions, moderators welcomed the guests and guided their contributions, oriented to the appropriate presentation and discussion times and indicated the remaining speaking time to the speakers. Finally, they supported the discussion rounds with stimulating input and structured notes to secure results on the virtual whiteboard. All moderators were supported by a student assistant. Students of the Master degree programmes "Continuing Education Research and Organisational Development" and "Economics" were involved systematically in the implementation - as far as time allowed - within the framework of selected and thus thematically appropriate courses.

### 5. The evaluation

2. Wie bewerten Sie die Konferenz insgesamt?

28  
Antworten

★★★★★  
Durchschnittliche Bewertung 4.50

3. In welcher Form haben Sie teilgenommen?

● Virtuell (Teams) 11  
● Physisch (DGUV) 7  
● Virtuell und Physisch 10



Fig. 1: Conference evaluation in general

<sup>6</sup> <https://geneme.lineupr.com/geneme2019>

On the basis of an online survey of all participants conducted during the conference in the form of a voluntary and anonymous evaluation, some empirical findings could be collected.

Among other things, the evaluation (cf. the following two figures 1 and 2) showed a high level of satisfaction among both face-to-face and online participants.

In this context, 78% of the respondents fully agreed with the statement "mood and atmosphere were very good". The conference in the hybrid format was also predominantly (very) positively evaluated, as the following figure 2 shows.

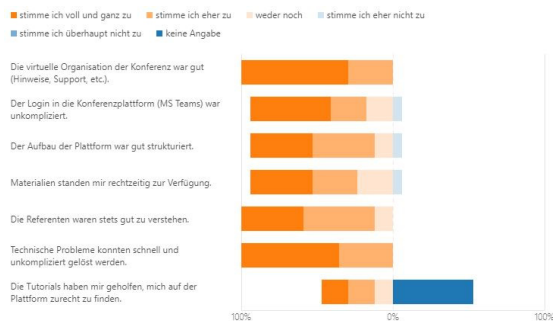


Fig. 2: Conference assessment hybrid format

## 6. Lessons Learned

All in all, the conference "Communities in New Media" (GeNeMe) presents innovative technologies and processes for organisation, cooperation and communication in virtual communities and forms a forum for professional exchange, especially in the fields of knowledge management and e-learning.

Due to the high demands on the flexibility of the operational implementation as well as the overall high workload of all participants, but also the clear limitations for face-to-face activities, the didactic design of interactive breaks and exchange formats traditionally practised at GeNeMe had to be greatly reduced in 2020. The breaks were also shortened as a result of the extremely full programme this time.

Online conference organisation with specific systems has been studied for some time as a problem of cooperative knowledge organisation [5]. In a non-pandemic setting with more

planning security (i.e. also binding booking of online or presence participation), even more interactive formats should be integrated in the future and hybridity should be further extended to these as well.

Here, socialising tools such as wonder.me<sup>7</sup> could also be increasingly used to organise the breaks. Initial experiments with hybrid interactive conference formats such as hybrid panel discussions and a hybrid workshop on the topic of gamification were very positively evaluated and will continue to be integrated into the conference in the future.

To what extent can the experiences documented here be adopted for academic teaching? Some concluding reflections show the potential that exists despite all the complexity:

1. The hybrid format per se lends itself to working with both small and large groups of students. However, with regard to the usual teaching, there is a big difference not so much in the digitality (which, especially in times of the pandemic, also works in teaching mostly by means of videoconferencing), but rather in the temporal dimension. While a seminar or lecture usually extends over the entire semester, the conference is only held for 2-3 days. In this respect, the group dynamics are different again, the participants hardly know each other or, at least in the context of the individual conferences, do not have the opportunity to build up long-term relationships, unlike students. In this respect, the conference would be more comparable to a block seminar.
2. Furthermore, in hybrid implementation we have a wide range of situating of the conference-related actions in a (partly virtual) conference location. This raises the question of the approach to the effectiveness of the conference, the immersion of the participants. On the one hand, this is a problem that is typical for a didactic setting and can therefore be transferred to teaching.
3. On the other hand, this requires the use of corresponding digital-spatial tools, especially for the virtual part of the conference. In the preparatory phase, GeNeMe 2020 considered at least partial use of VR-based

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wonder.me/>

cooperation platforms such as TriCAT<sup>8</sup>. However, due to the complexity of the application, but also against the background of the not inconsiderable costs, the organisers were unable to decide in favour of its use. There is certainly a need for development here. Perhaps in 2021, at the 24th GeNeMe conference, tools for VR-based cooperation can be used for the first time, which are already established for academic teaching in the portfolio of the participating universities?

4. GeNeMe uses different social media tools in the three phases of conference preparation, follow-up and implementation. These are tools for conference management (indico)<sup>9</sup>, for conference implementation (MS Teams) and for information management (LineUp). This diversity of completely independent tools is surprising. Moreover: at least at the TU Dresden, these tools are not used in teaching! Why is that?

As a result, it is more than desirable to support the individual use or the use of digital tools in scientific activities per se and to further develop them in a targeted manner. Empirical findings on the state of digitisation in science in Germany, especially Saxony, still show a considerable need for action here. [6]

### Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the conference participants for their participation in the evaluation as well as the sponsors of the GeNeMe conference, especially GFF. e.V. and SMWKT, for supporting the event in 2020.

### Literature

- [1] Köhler, T., Schoop, E. & Kahnwald, N. (2018). The Communities in New Media Conference Series – Research about Knowledge Communities in Business, Science and Public Administration over 20 Years; In Köhler, T., Schoop, E. & Kahnwald, N. (2018). Communities in New Media. Research on Knowledge Communities in Science, Business, Education & Public Administration. Proceedings of 21st Conference GeNeMe 2018. Dresden, TUD-Press. <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:14-qucosa2-334913>
- [2] Paraskevopoulou, K. & Köhler, T. (2020). Organizational models in virtual teaching cooperation – documentation and evaluation of organizational didactics in a collaborative higher education project; In: Köhler, T., Schoop, E. & Kahnwald, N.: Communities in New Media. From hybrid realities to hybrid communities. Proceedings of 23rd Conference GeNeMe; TUDPress, Dresden. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:14-qucosa2-728085>
- [3] Köhler, T., Neumann, J. & Lattemann, C. (2021). Organising academia online. Organisation models in e-learning versus e-science collaboration; In: Koschtial, C., Köhler, T., Felden, C.: e-Science. Open, social and virtual technology for research collaboration; Progress in IS Series; Berlin, Springer. [https://rd.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-66262-2\\_2](https://rd.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-66262-2_2)
- [4] Köhler, T., Schoop, E. & Kahnwald, N. (2020). Communities in New Media. From hybrid realities to hybrid communities. Proceedings of 23rd Conference GeNeMe 2020. Dresden, TUDPress. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:14-qucosa2-728085>
- [5] Raff, J.-H. & Köhler, T. (2008). Online-Konferenzorganisationssystem als Problem kooperativer Wissensorganisation: Erfahrungen mit WebEOS beim Kongress der DGfE 2008; DGfE-Mitteilungen, 36 (19).
- [6] Albrecht, S., Minet, C., Herbst, S., Pscheida, D. & Köhler, T. (2021). The use of digital tools in scholarly activities. Empirical findings on the state of digitization of science in Germany, with special focus on Saxony; In: Koschtial, C., Köhler, T., Felden, C.: e-Science. Open, social and virtual technology for research collaboration; Progress in IS Series; Berlin, Springer. [https://rd.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-66262-2\\_4](https://rd.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-66262-2_4)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.tricat.net/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://getindico.io/>