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Author(s): Fenyvesi, Kristof; Neittaanmäki, Pekka; Kulkarni, Heramb; Kulkarni, Shirin

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TRANSFORMING AN IN-PRIOR CONFERENCE INTO A MASSIVE ONLINE EVENT TO CELEBRATE THE UNITED NATIONS'S WORLD CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION DAY AMIDST THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Kristóf Fenyvesi, Pekka Neittaanmäki, Heramb Kulkarni and Shirin Kulkarni

Introduction

The University of Jyväskylä's UNESCO Chairs and the Council for Creative Education-Finland decided to celebrate the United Nation's World Creativity and Innovation Day in the form of a traditional, physical conference on 21 April 2020. During the last phases of preparations for the event, the COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly hit the world and the organisers needed to transform the traditional conference program into an online event with several innovative solutions. In this chapter, the conference organisers describe the theoretical and technical background of the online conference, which has started a new conference series at the University of Jyväskylä.

When it became clear that the conference could not be organised as a physical event, the organisers modified the conference's topic to respond to the "creative and innovative" challenges in education worldwide amidst the COVID-19 crisis. In the case of the initially planned offline event, a few hundred participants were expected from several different countries. However, to the greatest surprise of the hosts, the same educational conference in the online setting attracted 12,220 unique visitors from more than 60 countries across five continents.

The Conference

On 21 April 2020, the University of Jyväskylä's UNESCO Chairs (JYU) and the Council for Creative Education (CCE) successfully hosted a global online conference titled "Embrace the Creativity amidst COVID-19 Crisis". We organised the meeting to celebrate the United Nation's World Creativity and Innovation Day (<https://www.un.org/en/events/creativityday/>) by focusing on education and reflecting on the critical, pandemic situation in the whole world.

The response to the online event went beyond all expectations. The live online congress streamed through various social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and the CCE's website simultaneously worldwide resulted in more than 12,200 unique platform visits from 64 countries across the globe. "I am delighted that my colleagues found innovative ways to organise a global conference and we reached many people even though the world is closed down. The positive feedback encourages us to develop this new type of digital conference platform further," told Pekka Neittaanmäki, JYU's UNESCO Chair on Digital Platforms for Transforming Economies after the event.

The conference received essential contributions even during the online meeting. Reidun Twarock, a worldwide renowned professor of mathematical virology, introduced the structure of viruses and the impact of her team's findings on everyday education and fine arts. Teachers could participate and contribute from lockdown areas, like Luisa Lenta from the Red Zone of Italy, or Zhao Yuqian, an expert on distance learning who was working with children in the centre of the epidemic in the Hubei Province, China. World-renowned experts of educational creativity, Professor Pamela Burnard from the University of Cambridge, UK and Dr Anne Harris from RMIT, Melbourne, Janika Leoste, an expert on educational robotics from Tallinn University and Csilla Lázár, head of the Everyday Creativity project in Romania, contributed significantly to the event. Participants from all over the world discussed the challenges of distance learning, the creative and innovative potential of STEAM education in crisis, and issues related to health, well-being, and learning in critical situations. After the scientific talks, Professor Jim Friedman, the Chief Steward of World Creativity & Innovation Week, emphasised the crucial role of finding innovative ways for each other across many nations in COVID-19.

Shirin and Heramb Kulkarni and Bora Nam in the CCE's coordinators' team emphasised the massive response to the event: "The tremendous number of live stream visitors were super encouraging for us. After the conference, the full watch and playback time within a day has climbed to 2160 hours! This shows the significance of empowerment and interest of educators, maybe more than ever in these critical days."

As Michael Acerra, the head of the LUX BLOX educational innovation enterprise, reminded in the panel discussions, "The Italian Renaissance came out of the Black Plague. It is interesting how much creative explosion comes from the disruption of pandemics. We must restructure all school environments to cultivate, recognise and value creativity and innovation better."

Technical Details

The CCE's and JYU's planning team collaboratively designed the entire conference in a process-oriented mode based on the following main steps:

1. Conference design - themes and content
2. Collecting pre-recorded thematic short videos from the speakers to set up a platform offering a combination of asynchronous and synchronous participation for the conference visitors
3. Editing and online publication of the videos
4. Promotion
5. Communication and participants' interaction
6. Implementing online conference tools for asynchronous and synchronous participation and engagement
7. Hosting the conference
8. Providing digital e-certification for the participants

Tools used for video arrangements & editing:

- Adobe Premiere Pro
- YouTube audio library
- OBS
- Canva

The speaker's arrangement and conference planning were linked to communication and participants' interaction (Figure 1, 2):

- Emails
- Newsletters
- Wix Chat: chatbot optimised for conference answers
- Comments and response
- Asynchronous and synchronous discussions: 319 specific questions and comments received - 92 answered
- Badgecraft for blockchain certification



Figure 1: YouTube stream of the conference with online chat and comment options

Promotion:

- CCE's and JYU's social media platforms
- JYU's international STEAM network (<https://www.jyu.fi/it/en/research/research-areas/cognitive-science-and-education-al-technology/ile/projects/steamnet>) and other online communities

Analytics (Figure 3, 4):

- 1,400+ registered participants
- 66+ countries
- 126,000+ video views in 5 days
- 28 speakers
- 12,200+ unique online users



Figure 2: Snapshot from the speakers' Zoom pool.

Conference tools managed by Heramb Kulkarni (CCE):

- 8x8 video conferencing with WebRTC. recommendation: use Google Chrome - Avoid IE, Safari, etc.
- Screen sharing plugin
- YouTube live from 8x8
- OBS for live streaming to Facebook

Hosting:

There were 3 main online hosts for the live interaction - Kristof Fenyvesi (JYU), Shirin Kulkarni (CCE), and Heramb Kulkarni (CCE)

JYU and CCE distributed the work in the following way:

- Opening of the live interaction - Shirin Kulkarni and Heramb Kulkarni
- Session 1 host - Heramb Kulkarni
- Session 2 host - Kristof Fenyvesi
- Session 3 host - Kristof Fenyvesi and Shirin Kulkarni

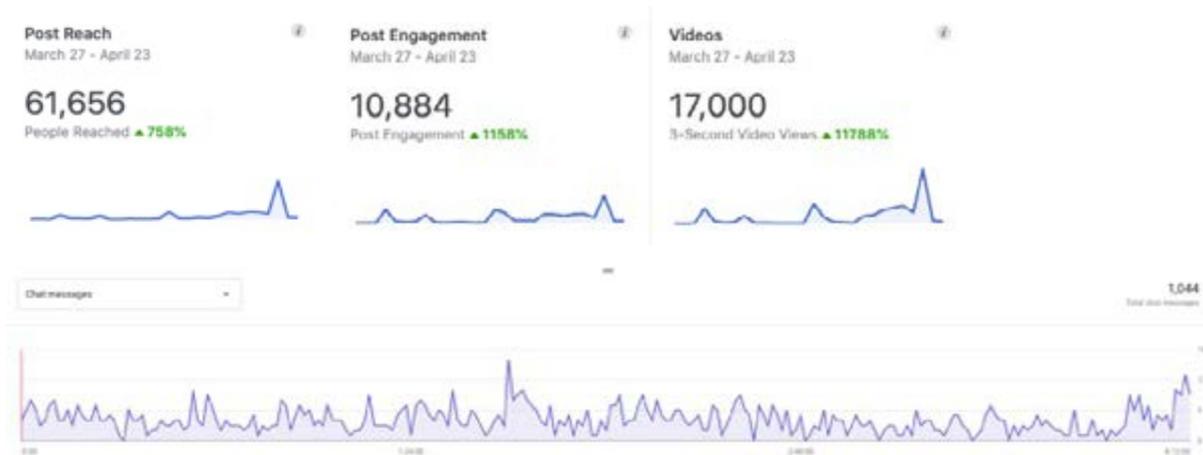


Figure 3: Analytics from social media platforms.

1.  India

2.  Finland

3.  United States

4.  Italy

5.  Romania

6.  Nigeria

7.  United Kingdom

8.  Japan

9.  Hungary

10.  Pakistan

Figure 4: Most active countries represented in the conference.

It was good to have three hosts for three sessions to bring in different perspectives on the topics.

Comments and questions from the audience on all live streaming platforms were constantly monitored, selected, and edited for the hosts by a Content Support Team using Google Docs.

Since its launch in 2020, this conference has been organised annually. When the COVID-19 situation allows, the full online conference will be transformed into a hybrid event with both fully online and on-site/hybrid participants.

Online conference materials: <https://www.ccefinland.org/21april>