



Changing from a face-to-face conference to a virtual conference: Tips from the LbL organising team

The 2020 Learning by Leaving (LbL) conference, set to take place in Vienna on June 4-5, 2020, had to be transformed into an online conference due to the Covid-19 crisis. The organising team would like to share their experiences, tips, and dos and don'ts within our networks as a guide for anyone who is planning to hold a virtual conference in the coming months.

1) Re-scheduling your agenda

The LbL conference was scheduled to take place over 1 and ½ days (from 9:30 – 15:00, with an evening programme to follow on day 1, and 9:00 to 13:00 on day 2). For an online conference the duration had to be cut substantially to around 3 hours per day.

This also meant cutting the duration of inputs and especially workshops. Workshops were cut from 90 minutes to 45 minutes. Due to the change to an online format only 3 out of 12 scheduled workshops were able to be realised in an online conference format by the workshop leaders.

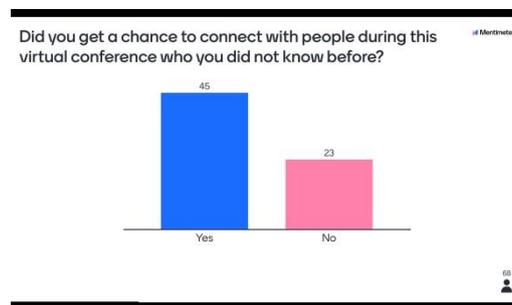
In order not to lose too much input, the organising team decided to introduce the shorter format of discussion tables, lasting around 20 – 25 minutes (a very short input followed by discussion). Multiple workshops could be successfully transferred to this format and there were also some completely new inputs!

As the LbL conference had always been planned as a networking conference, this aspect was of high importance to the organisers. The newly-introduced tables were one way of making sure networking took place, and another was to split the participants into smaller groups during the morning registration (8:20 – 8:50 on day one, 9:00 – 9:20 on day 2) and during breaks. To make sure that no one was “forced” to network, only participants who turned their cameras on were split into the groups.

The discussion tables proved to be very effective due to good preparation by the table hosts and colleagues who facilitated the note taking. They generated valuable recommendations to be considered for further discussion.



Even though many of the participants knew each other before the conference (coming from the same network, country, or having met at one of the former LbL conferences) an amazing number of 45 (out of 68 who answered the question) stated in the online evaluation that they met someone at LbL Vienna they had never met before!



2) Choosing the right software

The OeAD office usually uses *Go To Meeting / Webinar* as its standard meetings software. While it is sufficient for most meetings and workshops, for the LbL conference with more than 120 participants it lacked essential features for an online conference at this scale.

The organising team decided on Zoom (after deliberations with our technical support and legal department), as this software makes it possible to:

- Show all participants with their camera picture (if they turn it on), creating a feeling of seeing and being seen (our usual software only allows for 25 cameras to be on at the same time)
- “Send” people into smaller groups during breaks (see above) and workshops and have them return automatically after a set time
- Have people in a “waiting room” before you manually let them enter the conference space (see data protection)

3) Hiring a professional technical support team

It became clear very early on that in order to have a conference that runs smoothly professional support for all the technical details was needed. This was especially true in the time before the conference, as we needed the technical support to talk about open questions (how to best implement the data protection, how can we make sure networking is





possible, what are the best tools to use). We also had to make sure that all involved parties were able to use all the features on Zoom. So, together with our technical support David R thler, we had separate meetings for:

- The organisational team (several meetings)
- Moderator
- Speakers
- Workshop hosts
- Table hosts
- Evening tourist tour provider
- And last, but not least: 2 test sessions for the participants

It proved to be really important to clear all aspects before the day of the conference. David advised not only on practical matters (how to turn on your camera, lighting, sound), but also on possibilities on Zoom (for example: splitting people into groups during workshops, using the Zoom poll function, how to best share your screen, what to take into consideration when you want to show a video...).

It has also been shown that it is absolutely necessary that the setting during the technology checks **before** the event must be exactly the same as the settings during the event. This means that during the conference every speaker should be in exactly the same room, in the same position as during the technology check before the conference. This applies in particular to all active persons such as keynote speakers, the moderator, workshop leaders, etc.

The large amount of time the organising team was required to invest must be taken into consideration here, as at least one of us (if not more) was present at each of these meetings. Detailed planning of each minute of the conference and everyone's role in it is even more important than for face to face conferences, where small adaptations can be discussed on site.

But also during the conference itself, professional technical support is essential for a conference on a bigger scale. Small bugs can be handled effortlessly by the tech support.

4) Data protection

Zoom is a U.S. company and we had to make sure that all legal obligations in place in Austria/Europe (especially according to the GDPR) were taken into consideration and followed 100%. This included:





Drafting texts concerning data protection that were used in the online registration form.
All participants had to accept them in order to take part.

Using the waiting room before letting participants in. This way, all participants had to register before taking part in the conference and had to check the boxes that they had been informed about data protection. It also prevented persons from outside our networks from entering the conference and posting inappropriate content in the chat.

Recording presentations in “speaker mode”. Only the person speaking will be in the recording. During the key messages and inspirational speech, all participants’ microphones were turned off by technical support to prevent someone from involuntarily speaking. (Then their camera image would have been in the recording and we would not have been able to use it). To make sure that participants’ questions and comments could be taken into consideration, the chat function was used.

Here are the texts we used:

Recording and photo consent:

I consent that during the conference, plenary sessions may be recorded and photo screenshots taken. During recordings in the plenary session, meeting participant cameras and microphones will be disabled by the host to ensure data protection. I acknowledge that recordings may include all or parts of ‘chat’ transcripts and that content may be used in an anonymised form for event documentation. I am aware that questions can be asked anonymously in the chat on request. I have been further informed that using my real name and enabling my camera and microphone during the conference is always optional in order to secure privacy and data.

Use of Zoom.us Consent

I acknowledge that the video conferencing solution Zoom.us. will be used for most parts of this conference. Zoom.us informs its clients that it has introduced tools and processes to ensure compliance with requirements imposed by the GDPR. No LbL meeting link will be made public and pre-registration, meeting password(s) and a waiting room area are established as the default settings by the LbL host. In addition, ‘Screen Sharing’ is permitted for hosts only. I consent that I have been informed about zoom.us communications GDPR compliance, available at: <https://zoom.us/gdpr>

Data Protection Declaration

I consent that the data that I provide when registering online for this events will be processed and stored for the preparation of the event, for the transmission of event documents, for the organisation of the event, to document the event (in particular by means of lists of participants that will not be shared outside the networks) and, if applicable, for the transmission of presentations as well as for event documentation and for the evaluation of the event. With the exception of 10.2 of



the data protection declaration no data will be passed on to third parties. Further information is available in the data protection declaration.

Add to participants list Consent (optional)

I agree that my data (name, institution, network represented, country and e-mail address) is added to a “list of participants” that will be distributed after the conference by e-mail to enable further networking. The list will only be distributed to consenting participants.

5) Setting up the organisation team and support

The core organising team of the conference was made up by the Europass and Euroguidance centres from Austria. The programme itself was discussed with the representatives from Eurodesk and Eures before the initial conference was set up. We had further meetings with our colleague from Eurodesk and received valuable input. It had originally been planned that Eurodesk would join the core organising team, but due to time constraints this was unfortunately not possible. We were very happy, however, that Eurodesk Austria was able to be a table host!

This meant that, especially compared to the previous conferences in Germany and Italy, the Austrian team was very small. There were 5 people on the team, 4 of whom only have half-time positions in the EG/EP teams!

If your goal in changing from a regular conference to an online format is to need fewer working hours / persons involved, we regret to inform you that the opposite was true for us. We were happy to be able to rely on a few very friendly co-workers from the National Agency Erasmus+ to help us out on the days of the conference. To give a quick overview of some of the things that were needed to be done from the time we changed to the online format:

Before the conference:

- Finding the right online tool
- Finding the right technical support (and setting up a contract with them)
- Finding a moderator with experience in moderating online conferences
- Changing the agenda to adapt to the needs of an online format (shortening)
- Changing the website according to the new agenda
- Creating a new registration tool
- Making sure the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) needs are met
- Coming up with ideas on how to make networking possible during the conference
- Coming up with a virtual evening programme (virtual city tour)



- Setting up a detailed schedule regarding:
 - Technical process
 - Moderation
 - Allocation of tasks (who is going to be responsible for which task on the day of the conference)
 - Spatial set-up of the organisation team (determine who is sitting in which room)
- Briefing the moderator
- Briefing of the table hosts, workshop leaders and the supporting colleagues of the own organisation
- It is also recommended that the workshop moderators and rapporteurs discuss all important points (e.g. precise schedule of the workshop, role allocation, etc.) **before** the conference because there is no opportunity for private discussions during the conference.
- Setting up / attending all technical meetings and checks with speakers and workshop / table hosts
- Coming up with ideas on evaluation and documentation methods
- Preparing the Mentimeter and Yopads (see below)
- Preparing the social wall and social media wall (if desired)
- Determine which means of communication the organization team uses to communicate with each other during the conference.

On the day of the conference

- Early last-minute checks with the speakers
- A team of 2-3 people for letting people in from the waiting room (includes checking when people are not known if they belong to the networks and asking them to first register). One person on duty the whole morning for latecomers.
- Asking people to change their display names to real names (we had an “IPHONE 123” as participant) and to enter their network and country (to enable better networking).
- Monitoring the chat function – answering ad hoc technical questions via chat, collecting questions / comments for the moderator, to pass them to the speaker.
- Providing support to the moderator (who was in our office during the conference)
- Being moderators and providing support for workshops and tables
- Reacting to on the spot problems (moderator has no internet connection, questions from participants, workshop hosts, etc.)
- One person to feed posts into Social Media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram)



6) Evaluation / Documentation

While we have a regular evaluation form in the OeAD, we still wanted participants to be able to a) give their opinions and b) see what other people think in real time. We purchased a license for “Mentimeter” to make this possible. After coming up with the questions, we had to enter them into the tool for a test.

We also wanted to document the conference and came up with using Yopad to record topics and recommendations from the tables and workshops. This way, participants could enter their names into the documents, a colleague from the organising team or NA Erasmus+ summarized the table discussions and participants could enter recommendations. We recommend making backups of these pads, since accidental deletes by participants cannot be reversed.

Participants could vote on the recommendations from day one. One colleague downloaded all Yopads and summarized the findings. This had to be entered into Mentimeter on the morning of the second day and the moderator had to be briefed accordingly.

The documentation will be on the LBL website (videos, pdfs, Yopads, etc.). The most important recommendations will also be forwarded to the European Commission.

7) Further Networking / Social Media

Beyond the break-out rooms, small table discussions, Yopads and Mentimeter a **Social Wall** was set up before the conference for participants to introduce themselves and get to know each other. https://padlet.com/david10/learning_by_leaving

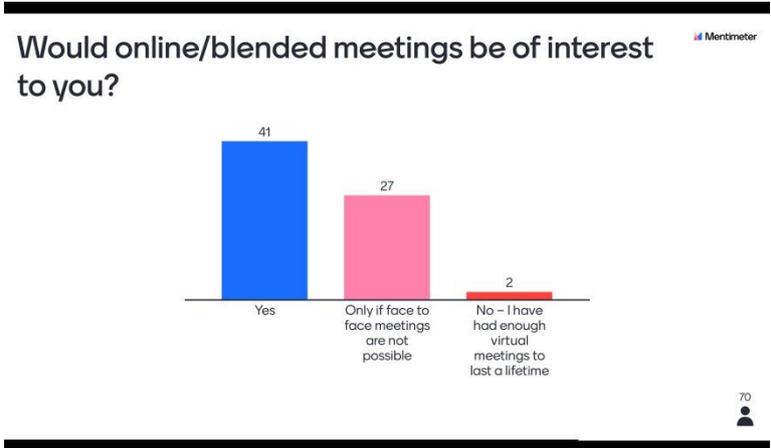
The event was heavily featured on our social media channels before and during the conference. A **Social Media Wall** was set up.

<https://learningbyleaving.eu/social/socialmediawall/>

We created the hashtag #LbL20 for all postings.

8) Where do we go from here?

The organising team found the transformation of the conference to a virtual event challenging, invigorating and overall a great learning experience. We were especially pleased that networking was possible for participants in this format, even though a face-to-face meeting is of course still preferable for networking conferences! Our participants had the same opinion:



All in all, the online conference – with all the extra work to be done – turned out to be a very positive experience for us! With no small thanks due to the 120+ participants!

