

The Successful Completion of ReDICO's First E-Co-Conference

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From 29 June to 1 July 2022 the research co-operative “ReDICO: Researching Digital Interculturality Co-operatively”, financed by the German Ministry for Education and Research, held its first E-Co-Conference dedicated to the topic of “Lifewide Learning: Transformations and New Connections in Postdigital Societies”. In accordance with the idea of an ecological and co-operative conference – an E-Co-Conference – it took place in a hybrid form, veering from completely online to completely face-to-face, with the University of Jena cooperating directly with the Hellenic Open University from Greece for the first two days. Indeed, three separate conference forms were embraced for the duration of the academic event. On the 29 June the conference took place online only and via Zoom, while on 30 June it embraced a hybrid form, with presenters and an interested audience at the conference centre at the Dornburger Castles, near Jena, joining with online presenters and discussants from around the world, including participants and presenters from Albania, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Pakistan and of course Germany. Events on 1 July took on a more ‘local’ character at the Dornburger Castles, with the day being chiefly dedicated to Jürgen Bolten; long-term Professor at the University of Jena and indeed founder of the subject of Intercultural



The Dornburger Castles

Communications in Jena. The third day was also confined to a face-to-face context and drew especially on many presenters from, or associated with, the University of Jena.

Day 1, 29 June 2022: Online

The online-only conference day on 29 June commenced with an introductory presentation from Luisa Conti and Fergal Lenehan (University of Jena and ReDICO), who gave an overview of the ReDICO project itself, as well as what was to be expected from the first day of the conference. The first part of Day 1 was very much dedicated to the formal learning context of schools and commenced with an interactive keynote speech by Nektaria Palaiologou (Hellenic Open University) on the topic of “Intercultural Communication and Digital Education in the Covid 19 Pandemic: Inclusion or Exclusion?” Next came Eleni Antoniadou (Hellenic Open University) who talked about the “Challenges Teachers Face and the Need for Digital Resources”, while Siobhán Brownlie (Le Mans University and the University of Manchester) discussed the “‘Global Classroom’: Postdigital Connecting Across Continents”. Milene Mendes de Oliveira and Mario Antonio Tuccillo (University of Potsdam and ReDICO) then presented their findings on “Learning and Participation in the Online Intercultural Game Megacities”, followed by Christine Fenech, Janice Darmanin (Institute for Education, Malta), Luisa Conti and Klara Räthel (University of Jena) who reported from the EU-financed KIDS4ALLL project and gave a paper entitled “Peer-Learning Buddies: Building an Inclusive Learning Environment for Migrant and Non-Migrant Students”. The next presenters Tanja Schroot, Maria Cavaletto and Roberta Ricucci (University of Torino) also hailed from the KIDS4ALLL project and talked about “Digital Competences in the Educational Sphere: Knowledge – Skills – Attitudes – A Case Study from Italy”.

The conference then changed tack, to an extent at least, and more informal contexts of learning were gradually introduced. Roman Lietz and Magdalena Loska (University of Mainz and ReDICO) introduced their ideas concerning integration in the new digital context in their paper “‘Integration Takes Place On-Site’: An Integration Paradigm on the (Postdigital) Test Bench”. Next Came Independent Researcher Virginia Signorini who presented the paper “When Devices Divide: Accessing Education in Covid Times for Migrants and Refugee Students across Europe”, followed by Marina Karkouli who brought us back to more formal contexts of learning with her presentation on “Teachers’ Perceptions of the 4th Industrial Revolution and Digital Transformation”. The last paper of the evening came from Fergal Lenehan (University of Jena and

ReDICO) who looked at very informal learning contexts when discussing “Learning by Scrolling? The Twitter Thread as Cosmopolitan Potentiality and Lifewide Informative Textual Offer”.

By this stage the day had not yet come to an end: Indeed, the entertainment had still to begin!

This came in the form of a public reading and discussion with award-winning Irish author Nuala O’Connor. The ReDICO Research Co-Operative had commissioned Nuala to write a piece of “flash fiction” – a short, short story, especially suited to the digital context – reacting to the topic of “digital interculturality”. The author read her text, “Of Wineapples and Acorns”, to a rapt online audience, some of



Nuala O’Connor during conversation

whom also read along. Following this, Nuala O’Connor engaged in a conversation with ReDICO members Fergal Lenehan and Lymor Wolf Goldstein (University of Jena and ReDICO) covering many topics, including the merits of flash fiction, bilingual writing, digital fiction and the future of the paper book. The day drew to a close on the platform Wonder.Me, which offered conference goers a more informal space to engage with each other.

Day 2, 30 June 2022: (Largely) Hybrid

While Day 2 was largely hybrid, the morning was still dedicated to the purely online context. It began with a presentation from Edlira Gugu (University of Elbasan) and Ema Kristo (University of Tirana), who presented their paper on digital transformation during the Covid 19 period in Albania “Digitale Transformationskultur: Der Fall Albanien, Schwerpunkt Hochschulbildung”. Following this, the next 90 minutes were dedicated to an interactive workshop given by Elisa Hofmann (University of Jena) on the topic of “Digital Tools for Data Collection and Analysis”, which gave participants the opportunity to get to know a variety of tools and, indeed, to try them out for themselves.

From here on the conference was hybrid, with papers given at the baroque Dornburger Castles, interweaving with papers, questions and discussion points drawn from the conference context of the Zoom platform. Thus, this part of the conference did not just investigate postdigitality but was also inherently postdigital itself, merging the digital and the material contexts. Conference attendees in Dornburg also got to taste the delights of Heldenküche, the Leipziger catering company providing for everyone's sustenance. Judith Wolf (University of Jena) presented the first Dornburg paper and discussed "Novel Virtual Communication in Times of Crisis: Insights into



A Presentation by Pia Diergarten

the Learning Processes of Hospital Employees during the Covid 19 Pandemic". From here Pia Diergarten (University of Jena) gave a paper on "'Bildung' and Artificial Intelligence: Anthropological Aspects Concerning Higher Education", while Rawan Tahboub presented on the topic of "Virtual Exchange as a Mechanism for Digital Education". The Jena voices

were joined virtually then by Shayan Aqdas (City Postgraduate College for Women, Punjab) who talked about "The Impact of Online Classes on Students' Learning in the Context of Covid 19 in Pakistan". The last voice to be heard was also virtual and came from the partner institution, the Hellenic Open University's Vlasios Manolias who gave "An Overview of E-Learning Platforms for Learning Greek as a Second/Foreign Language: Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Evaluation".

Day 3, 1 July 2022: Face-to-Face

While Day 2 was a technologically-hybrid day, Day 3 was analogue and face-to-face but more linguistically hybrid and bilingual, with presenters having the option of presenting in either English or German. This day was also dedicated to long-term Professor of Intercultural Communications at Jena, Jürgen Bolten, and stories and memories of Jürgen, and indeed of Jürgen's influence upon many of the conference's attendees, were interwoven into the fabric of the day. The ReDICO Research Co-operative had also commissioned the Chilean artist Akemi Paz to create a series of images reacting to all of the day's papers, based on the abstracts. Thus, the

day was also an evolving art exhibition! Before the presentation of each paper, Akemi's image created for it was presented, discussed and interpreted: Creating also, thus, an especially relaxed discursive atmosphere. The image was also then viewed collectively after the presented paper, allowing us to observe how many meanings were visualised. This was, therefore, a visual summary, but also constituted a stimulus for recalling various aspects introduced by the paper.

The day commenced again with conference organisers and ReDICO members (Luisa Conti and Fergal Lenehan): Fergal welcomed everyone to the conference and gave an overview of the day ahead, while Luisa introduced the conference topic "Lifewide Learning: When Transcultural Learning Becomes Ubiquitous". From here Emilian Franco (University of Munich) discussed work culture and intercultural perspectives on the open source software platform GitHub in his paper "Learning to Code on Open Source Platforms: About the Need for a 'Digital-Autocratic' Mindset". Jürgen Bolten's long-term collaborator Claus Ehrhardt from the University of Urbino then presented his research on speech acts in public spaces, as viewed through the prism of a binational hybrid seminar: "Sprechhandlungen in öffentlichen Räumen: Eindrücke von einem binationalen Seminar in hybriden Format". Nicole Brandstetter (University of Applied Sciences, Munich) then gave a paper investigating intercultural business English in flux: "Interkulturelles Wirtschaftsenglisch im Wandel: Ergebnisse einer Befragung im Rahmen des Masterstudienprogramms 'System Engineering'". During the lunch break the Arabic-German fusion folk band from Jena "Zwei Stimmen" entertained the guests.



Audience listening attentively

Following the break, Jürgen Bolten (University of Jena) himself – an inspirational figure for so many people at the conference – presented his current ideas surrounding current world-wide political instabilities, the ubiquitous nature of uncertainty requiring a wider range and more relevant form of intercultural competence, and virtual learning processes in the paper:

“Scimification: Affektive Einstiege in ganzheitliche virtuelle Lernprozesse”. Then from the University of Jena also came Daniela Gröschke, Laura Malik and Jaël In’t Veld, who presented results from their EU-funded project on World-Open-Learning in their paper “Perspectives on Diversity in Thuringian Schools”. Yolanda López García (University of Jena) subsequently presented a paper on lifewide learning and Mexican migrant groupings online, entitled “Rethinking Interrelations between Lifewide Learning, Migration and the Postdigital Everyday”.

The conference concluded with Steffen Höhne’s (University for Music, Weimar) presentation on digitization and how it has transformed the production, distribution and reception of cultural goods, not least of course music: “Die digitale Transformation und die Kultur: Perspektiven der Produktion, Distribution und Rezeption von kulturellen Gütern und Angeboten”. A fitting finale, both thematically and indeed emotionally, as Steffen Höhne was the first “Habibitant” (formalised post-doctoral scholar) in Intercultural Communications in Jena to be mentored by Jürgen Bolten, while Jürgen Bolten’s second last Habibitant was Fergal Lenehan and his last/present Habibitantin was Luisa Conti: the organisers of the conference.

From here the Sekt flowed and the conference attendees could enjoy the late summer evening in the Dornburg Castle gardens. The evening’s entertainment was provided by alternative-latino rock-band Gusano de Oído. The remaining ice-cream and cake were sampled further and, as the evening grew cooler and darker, people started moving towards their hotels and homes in Jena.



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