

This was GRONEN2020!

Sharing some learnings, reflections, and an outlook into the future

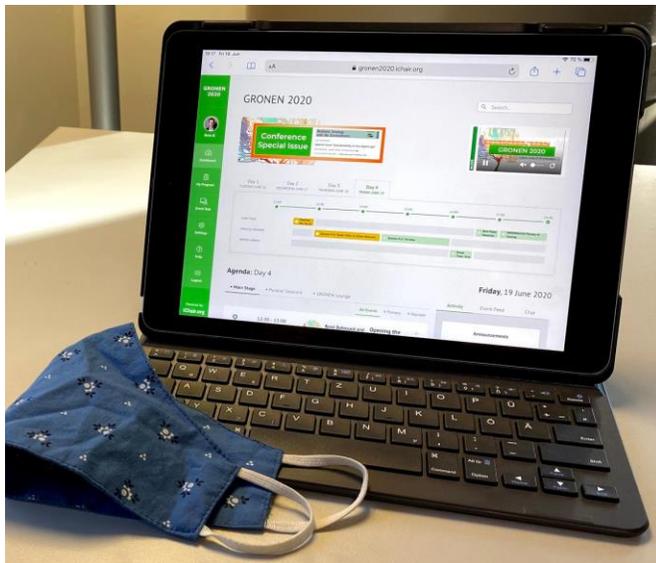
Dear colleagues and friends,

As many of you know, GRONEN embarked on a fully virtual pilot this year: 113 participants, 52 synchronous paper presentations, 58 hours live-stream, and 8 virtual bars and socials (including a remote sightseeing tour through Lisbon, a fireside talk in virtual reality and a pub quiz).

As AOM2020 is getting closer, here we are with some feedback and learnings we can share with you regarding this experience – which has also been recently featured in [nature](#).

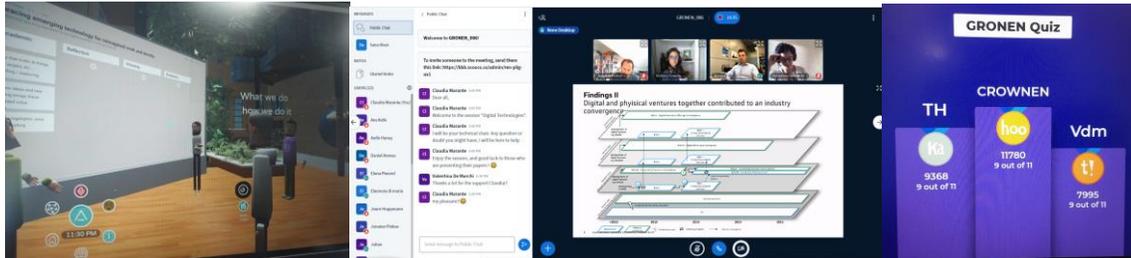
Participation. Preliminary results from the post-attendance survey suggests that 90% had never attended a virtual conference before but agreed that it was much better than expected! Interestingly, 75% of them attended 70% or more of the program, rather than just taking some little bits; and 80% of the participants are convinced that hybrid formats (i.e. virtual plus physical) are to be considered for the future. Some points that participants let us know surprised them about a virtual conference:

- *“How much I felt attached to the conference.”*
- *“The intensity of interactions, the possibility to socialize.”*
- *“The emotional appeal of „having seen the colleagues again“ - this time, including their home offices.”*
- *“Feeling so close with the other attendees.”*



The new venue: iChair.org

Socialization and engagement. We had a short opening and closing each day and later on learnt that “these daily briefings by the organizers were super useful to create a sense of community.” People also liked the several socialization options enabled by the iChair platform: there were options to chat and having a way to get in touch outside of sessions, e.g. in a chat roulette, or to organize ‘social bars’.



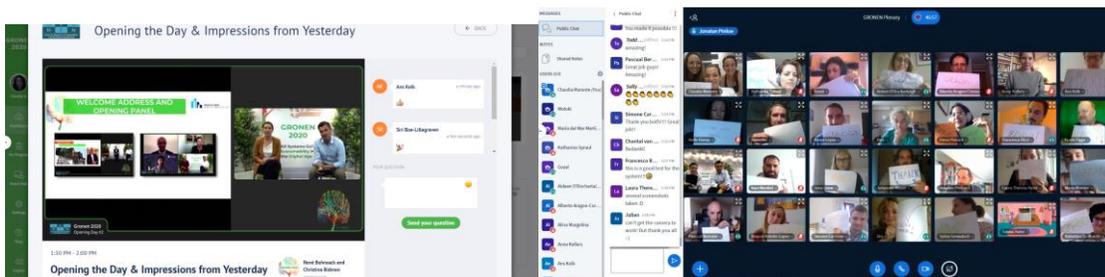
Brainstorming in VR

Paper Session

Virtual Pub Quiz Results

Savings and gains. A quick calculation shows that we were able to save about 65 t of CO₂ (580 kg of CO₂ x 113 participants), 678 hours of travel, and almost 130.000 € in resources by taking the conference online! A milestone for making academic conferences more climate friendly and accessible. Also, people appreciated the inclusiveness, the comfort, the ease of connection between young & experienced scholars.

Of course, a sense of place and the possibility to gather with colleagues is priceless; and virtual conference organization is not flawless – quite some effort is needed. For us, that meant setting up a conference platform (and being ready to modify it to adapt to the emerging needs); having a team of technical chairs to support each session, reaching out to presenters prior to presentations and doing a test-run. But we experienced that virtual conferences are possible, being a different model of academic exchange, other than a replacements-by-necessity. Possibly the conference year 2020 will help to spur the transition to more virtual and environmental-friendly meetings in addition to physical ones, even beyond the coronavirus pandemic?



Daily Welcome Session

Final Closing

Valentina de Marchi, René Bohnsack, Christina Bidmon