

Interview with the Local PGF Conference Organizers Katerina Steffan and Lujain Youssef

Conducted by Ioana-Marina Pantelici, transcribed by Adebola Ojo



Figure 1: Katerina Steffan and Lujain Youssef share some insights about their experiences in planning 2023 PGF Conference “Spaces of Affect in the Americas” in Hannover. Watch a video of the interview, edited by Mandana Vahabi, here: <https://flowcasts.uni-hannover.de/nodes/ZkAxd>.

Ioana-Marina Pantelici: Can you share some behind-the-scenes details about the planning and the logistical aspects of the PGF 2023?

Lujain Youssef: Let me describe it with one word: Chaos! I mean, at the very beginning, we did not know what to do, what to expect, how to organize anything. We did several brainstorming sessions and then we started losing members of the organizing team. Then, you need to put it together like a puzzle. When you have a little bit of something, you can add to it, and then it starts looking like something that is structured and organized.

Katerina Steffan: I think the most important thing is that we got a lot of help. We got Team Regensburg who did this last year and who were very helpful, who gave us all the lists of what they

organized, and which different aspects should be considered – for example, the money issue. And they also gave us time slots, saying what you should do first and what to do later, like trying to contact someone to give the keynote at the very beginning – and maybe do not contact three at the same time. There were lots of practical tips that they also got from other PGF meetings before; there is just this huge, collaborative effort. Different files that exist have been passed on like some kind of knowledge. I think we would have missed a lot of things if we did not have those.

Lujain Youssef: Of course, yes. We had all the general guidelines, and now we can be the experts for the next team. So, we had all these guidelines and tips, and we had to make sense of where to begin and what to do to have something that resembles what other teams have already accomplished. We had the end result of what they did, and then we had to begin somewhere and built it up. The thing is that, throughout the years, the PGF developed a lot. I have only been to one and the years before it was very informal. People would come together and, supposedly, share their work. It was not organized as a real conference; I think it might just have been the last few years that people tried to do that.

Ioana-Marina Pantelici: *What were the biggest challenges you faced and how did you overcome them?*

Lujain Youssef: First, the money was one of the huge things – and to have everything aligned at the same time: to get the room, to talk to caterers, figure out how much money we might need and how much money, realistically, we can get, and then where to spend it. Whatever money you get, it comes with conditions. Another challenge is to try to make it as diversified of a conference as possible, to include and incorporate all different perspectives as well, and to come up with the structure for the entire thing.

Katerina Steffan: I think the issue is also that so many people are involved, which is frustrating. You cannot just plan ahead because you have to wait for someone to send a confirmation for money, or to send an email saying this and that. So that is really exasperating, especially because we have been quite a big group at the beginning, six or seven people. We tried to split the work as evenly as possible, which, on the one hand, made it more difficult because you constantly had to switch back and forth and ask, “What are you doing?” Especially when people dropped out, we were confronted with questions such as “Are you still doing this? Or are you not doing this? And when, what have you done already? Where are your files?” That was very difficult. I think the worst thing that happened was that we did not close the registration. We thought that it would be cool that people can register the whole time because we did not consider that we would have to know exact numbers for the caterer, for example. I contacted the caterers in June already, and they knew that we were going to have a conference and they knew that we would have approximately 40 people. I could only contact them a week before, and they were like, “Okay, well, we kind of have given up that space that we had for you now. You could have called earlier.” But we did not have the numbers! So that was bad. We were lucky; one caterer called another caterer and asked for help, and we split the order – that was good. Even with the flyers: you cannot print the flyers. I mean you can print a lot of flyers, but it costs you more money if you print eighty instead of forty. Things like these were very frustrating.

Lujain Youssef: You also have to wait until the last minute because of people dropping out or new people turning up again – whether they were people who have registered or speakers. I mean,

nothing comes together until the very last moment. But at the same time, you need to start organizing way ahead of time. If you want to get the money, you need to already have numbers, people, a space, and everything in order. You already need to have those numbers, but those numbers were only finalized two days ago.

Katerina Steffan: Even money-wise. The folders that we have now, we did not want to have them. We actually wanted to print our own folders, but the more you order, the cheaper they get. So, you would have to had known at the beginning too how many people there would be.

Lujain Youssef: There was a lot of improvisation also!

Katerina Steffan: And the thing is, we had a whole year, which is crazy. I have been thinking, “What did we do this whole year?” But we have been working on it the whole time. That is so many fingers and many bits that come together in the end.

Lujain Youssef: So, it was all in abstract terms, until the very last one or two weeks.

Ioana-Marina Pantelici: *Could you provide some insight into the decision-making process that led to the selection of “Spaces of Affect in the Americas” as the theme for PGF 2023?*

Lujain Youssef: I think we tried to find something that most of us were working on. Even if you do not work on it for your PhD, or a project, at least you would relate to it somehow. We thought – because we were initially seven people – if we find a topic that was inclusive enough to have all seven people relate to, then that would also be inclusive enough for other people from different universities. It was, again, like a brainstorming session. What could it be about? We then threw in some words about our individual projects and then found something that we could all agree on.

Katerina Steffan: I think we also felt that was something that everyone in the PGF can work with, too. Because even if you do not work in Affect Studies, obviously everyone who reads a novel will face the emotions in it. There will be spaces in it that you can discuss, and I do not think it is too big of a jump to think about this while you work on something else. Also, the topic is very present in academia, and so many people are working on Affect now. I do not think it has been done before. I think it was a good time to just address the topic in general.

Lujain Youssef: It is recent, it is provocative, and it is inclusive. Thus, we thought that it would be perfect for our conference. Decision-making-wise, we had meetings to update each other on what everyone was working on — not to vote on things, but just to propose some things and see what the others were thinking about them. There were some individual decisions in smaller, more practical manners, not the concept or the huge things, such as the program or the abstract. I mean, altogether we did organize it very well, amongst ourselves, but also for others.

Ioana-Marina Pantelici: *How did you approach the decision-making process when establishing categories for panels and sorting through the individual submissions?*

Lujain Youssef: Keywords. We had them, and then we read them. Instead of ranking them, we had these keywords to describe those abstracts. When we said that we want these abstracts to be

included, we started to shift and change the different panels. We initially approved of having five panels and distributing these abstracts into these five panels according to the theme or genre.

Katerina Steffan: Yes, but we also just met and thought about the different aspects: which abstracts do you feel work well together? Which ones have a similar idea or content? The goal was to see how we get them equally spaced throughout the three days.

Author Biographies

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