How to Empower the Youngsters?

GXC challenge with Munich City District Youth Association

Overview

The challenge for this project was proposed by the Munich City District Youth Association, in German Kreisjugendring München-Stadt (KJR), and has been previously discussed on a quadruple-helix experts workshop, organized by HM's network M:UniverCity. The KJR is a working group of more than 70 youth associations and communities in Munich. Children, adolescents and young adults between the ages of 6 and 27 are organized here, belonging to a wide variety of nationalities, denominations and social groups. With this challenge, the KJR aimed to receive ideas on how to promote digital youth participation in a proactive and sustainable way.

Problem

Organizations such as the the KJR currently lack engaging digital means of communication with its youth. Youngsters in many youth associations normally participate in processes that include discussion, voting, and information exchange in-person at local youth centers under the supervision of group leaders. The onset of COVID-19 limited such activities, and thus stifled youth engagement dramatically. At KJR, existing social media tools were used as temporary solution, but proved inadequate in its privacy policies and data-protection, as well as its lack of basic participatory functions. KJR's customer base includes children and young adults of various racial, ethnic or national backgrounds, and being sensitive to these aspects is important in creating an environment, which promotes inclusivity and diversity. In addition, youngsters with disabilities should not be at any sort of disadvantage. The KJR reality is not unique, many organizations and clubs working with youngsters face similar challenges.

In this sense, the challenge for the student teams was openly stated as: **The future of youth participation: How to empower the youngsters?**

Approach

Video lectures and weekly live sessions for content input as well as individual team coaching sessions with experts accompanied the students during their project work for nine weeks. The three student teams followed an innovation process applied in the action-learning course "Real Projects" from HM's entrepreneurship center SCE, starting by understanding the problem through general research about youth involvement, community engagement, youth censorship and data protection. During a first meeting with the KJR, the students were able to discuss the challenge in person and ask questions. Interviewing stakeholders also helped to better define the problem and collect rough ideas.

In the third week, with the support of Amazon Web Services and HM's Digital Transformation Lab, a two-part intensive workshop enabled the students to concretize first approaches of their problem solutions. A brainstorming exercise, the "Crazy Eight Ideation" method, helped them to come up with different kinds of initial ideas, which they then tried to structure. To apply a customer-centric focus the teams used the Amazon way of innovating, a method called "Working Backwards" during the workshop, which took into account the needs and wishes of the potential end-users as well as those of the perspective from the KJR. Using these techniques, the teams were able to decide on one final solution idea each. During the following six weeks, these ideas were then elaborated with the help of storyboards, fictional press releases, empathy maps, FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), business model canvases and, ultimately, digital prototypes. To get an idea of how to prototype using digital technologies, the students were provided with detailed information about three different tools during one of the weekly live sessions: Figma, Bubble and Glide.

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In a second online meeting with the challenge giver, the ideas and drafts of the prototypes were shown to the KJR for the first time. Valuable feedback helped the teams to further develop the prototypes and finalize them for the final presentation.

Prototypes

The first team *Intercos* used Figma to develop an app that allows youngsters across the city of Munich to chat, vote and exchange information in a digital format. The digital tool is envisioned for youth organizations such as the KJR, as primary means of digital engagement to allow youngsters and group leaders to host and participate in decision processes. The app serves as a tool with the potential to lead the way for both youth-led outreach as well as promotion of general youth engagement within an organization and broadly in society. With its help, children and young adults get a chance to find their place in their community and to participate in local events and activities. This way, the youth can be actively engaged in the happenings of the world and their communities.

The second team got inspired by the usability of the dating app 'tinder': Their mobile app *EVENTually* (prototyped with Figma) allows young people to find their perfect event or activity match by swiping through offers from different organizations, fitting it to their needs and wants. Focusing on the event/activity aspect, the app allows both online and offline events, discussion forums and enables youngsters to find people that share the same interests. This can mean small local events or even virtual events with hundreds of people. From parties to football matches or Fridays for Future marches – by downloading *EVENTually,* youngsters are able to easily find events that fit their preferences and to actively get involved in the process of planning and executing them while giving them responsibilities and teaching them how to be independent. It allows same-minded people to connect on a virtual basis before an event even takes place.
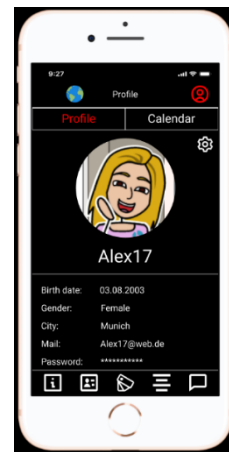
The mobile app *OurVoice*, developed by team three using Figma, is a digital hub encouraging young people (14-25) to get involved in local civic issues on a global scale. Considering that social disparities and injustices revealed during COVID-19, youth are revolutionizing digital activism and awaken their drive to make a difference in their community and future. Through this app, young people around the world have the opportunity to connect with each other beyond borders and differences, engaging in online discussion forums, polls, resources, virtual workshops, and events related to their social causes and interests. *OurVoice* empowers the youth' common vision to make a social change that positively shapes their future by amplifying youth voices.

Next Steps

The final presentation to the KJR and M:UniverCity took place on December 8th, 2020. Following the presentation, the student teams shared their presentations as well as a link to their prototypes with the KJR, who is planning on acquiring funds and support to implement a solution inspired by the prototypes. Furthermore, the teams were all invited to take part in the SCE Pitch Festival and compete with other student teams for a prize of € 1,000.

Documents

The final documentation and prototypes developed by the four teams are available open access:

- [InterCos](#)
- [EVENTually](#)
- [OurVoice](#)

About GXC

This project was one of three challenges of the **GXC International Virtual Innovation Challenge**. This is a special edition of the [Real Projects](#) course format, which was offered for the first time in the winter semester 2020/21 as part of the "GlobalXChanges/Challenges (GXC)" project. In this virtual online course, public governmental and non-governmental organizations propose innovation challenges that can be solved through digital technologies. Next, students from HM Hochschule München University of Applied Sciences (HM) and its four strategic partner institutions dive into an international virtual action-learning course. The students are divided into international interdisciplinary teams and follow an innovation process to tackle the proposed challenges and prototype solutions. The course includes video lectures and dynamic weekly live sessions with a professor for content input and additional tutoring and team coaching sessions with industry experts to advise on prototyping and mentor students in the challenges of remote international teamwork.

The GlobalXChanges/Challenges project is funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) from funds of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). For more information on the GXC measures and the International Virtual Innovation Challenge visit [hm.edu/gxc](#).