

Term Paper

(Mis)performing World Politics

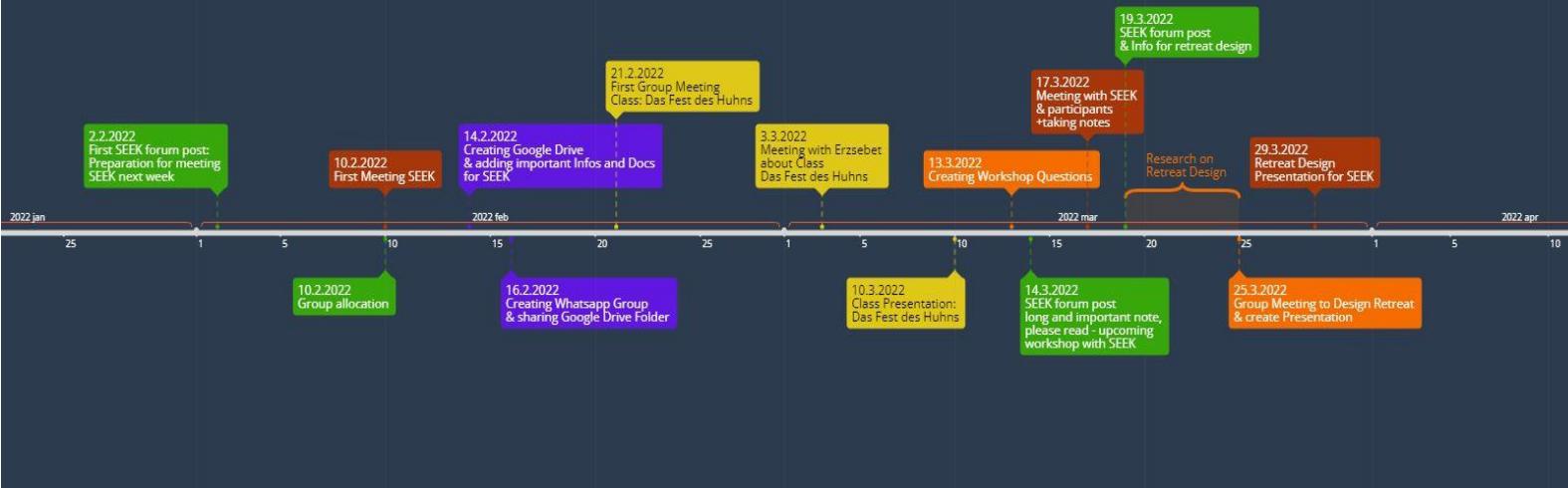
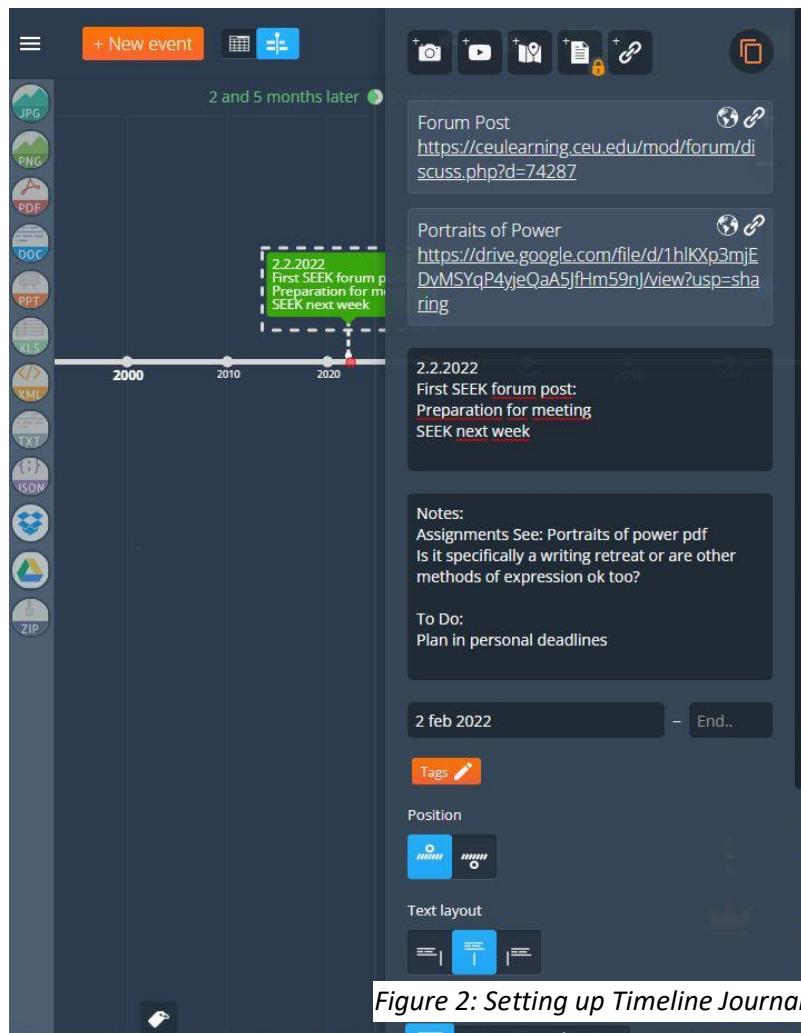


Figure 1: Timeline Journal: Retreat Design for SEEK's Portraits of Power

My project timeline journal: Designing a retreat for SEEK's Portraits of Power

Projects like the design of a retreat are often compiled from a substantial amount of information like Emails, Moodle Forum posts, notes and even WhatsApp group messages. To keep track of all the important information we make lists, create research diaries or Google Drive folders, but even in those cases it is often hard to stay on top of things, especially if a significant amount of the information consists of links. Since I knew very early on that I wanted to write my term paper about the process of creating our group's research design, I started compiling information in a Google Drive folder as a form of preliminary research diary. Unfortunately, that made it hard to add my personal notes and keep an overview of the work. Since I often create a timeline and deadlines when working on a bigger project or group projects, I decided to combine my timeline and our personal deadlines with the information we received about the project and with my notes to create what I like to call a “timeline

journal".¹ Of course, like with every group project, deadlines change, which meant I needed to be flexible which is why I used the online tool Time.Graphics² to create my Timeline Journal. As you can see in Figure 2:³ I was able to set up my Timeline Journal in a way that allowed me to keep track of any important information for the project without losing sight of the overall timeline⁴, which turned out to be crucial for writing my term paper.



¹ Bergler, *Timeline Journal: Retreat Design*.

² *Time.Graphics*.

³ Bergler, *Setting up the Timeline Journal*.

⁴ Bergler, *Timeline Journal: Retreat Design*.

With the help of my Timeline Journal, I will now continue to dive into the process of creating the research design, focusing only on the most important milestones of this project

When working alone, the process of creation often starts with ideas that need to be filtered by their potential to be realized, but in group projects this step often tends to come later. Instead, the first step is creating channels of communication like a WhatsApp Group and sharing important information as well as setting up structures to continuously share information and facilitate group work in the future for which a Google Drive folder for the group is quite useful. As you can see on Timeline in Figure 1,⁵ we created the Google Drive folder on the fourteenth of February, four days after the Group allocation and our first meeting with SEEK, so as not to lose track of any important information we received both in the forum posts and gathered from the meeting. It was a quite hard to find out everyone's phone number at first, but thankfully Nimaya, Barbara and I knew each other already, and since Barbara had another class with Tizian, we were able to create the group on the sixteenth of February and share all the important information we had gathered so far. Looking back, we could have just used the email portal of CEU to type in Tizian's name and written him directly, meaning we could have set up the group a little earlier, but everything worked out swimmingly in the end and within the mandatory deadlines.

With the channels of communication open and the Google Drive folder set up, we could finally start discussing the project and share our individual expectations regarding the end result, which we all agreed should be something that is not only enjoyable to all SEEK collaborators, but also memorable in a way that allows them to draw strength or motivation from this experience in the long term. This led us to the second step in our project: Understanding what we need to do based on the information we have, but first, I'd like to

⁵ Bergler.

mention another intermediate step, if you will, that I believe had significant influence on our process of creating a retreat design: Designing our own class for (Mis)performing World Politics. In the beginning, we weren't sure if we wanted to do it, because we were worried that it would take up a lot of time and energy that we wanted to put into the SEEK project. Ultimately, it turned out to do the opposite because it made us work on something together early on, which improved our teamwork capabilities as it allowed us to become attuned to each other and our respective working styles. As a result, designing the class for (Mis)performing World Politics beforehand ended up saving us a lot of time and energy because we became a well-oiled machine before we even started working on the SEEK project together and we had a lot of fun doing it as well.

After presenting our class for (Mis)performing World Politics, we quickly realised we had to focus on the tasks for the SEEK project again, but to complete the second step in understanding the assignment and to fully understand what was required of us, we first needed to formulate questions to ask the SEEK collaborators at the meeting, which was very tricky for us because we were overwhelmed by the amount of information that we received. This in turn left us unsure of what we wanted to focus on in order to adjust our questions for the SEEK collaborators accordingly. We started to formulate our questions for the meeting with the SEEK collaborators on the thirteenth of march, but were still unsatisfied with the result. Thanks to the forum post: "Long and important note, please read - upcoming workshop with SEEK"⁶ and the "Detailed notes on writing retreat preparation"⁷ document that both contained a lot of vital information we were able to fully understand the assignment and finished formulating our questions by the fifteenth. When we met with SEEK on the seventeenth of march, the questions we prepared coupled with the input by the collaborators helped us gain

⁶ Strausz, 'Long and Important Note, Please Read'.

⁷ SEEK, 'Detailed Notes on Writing Retreat Preparation'.

more insight into the possibilities we could pursue with our retreat design. We took copious notes throughout the meeting with the collaborators and their preferences in a shared Google Document and also took notes based on the four main themes: Logistics, mode of expression and interaction, documentation and dissemination.

While the meeting with the SEEK collaborators was an important step in creating the design of the retreat, I think designing a class beforehand was incredibly helpful in preparing us for designing a retreat as well, not just because we quickly learned how to work together, but because we started thinking in terms of what is enjoyable for the participants instead of just thinking about what we wanted to do. We adapted this type of thinking for designing our retreat and I believe calling the women SEEK collaborators instead of participants had a significant impact on how we viewed their agency in this process from the start. By calling them collaborators, we viewed them as colleagues rather than clients and I really think that this improved the quality of our research design, because we worked to create something together. Other important aspect in preparing for the retreat design included the readings and exercises for (Mis)performing World Politics, like the book “Arts-Based Methods for Decolonising Participatory Research”⁸ which talks about Workshops that encourage participants to use forms of knowledge practices that differ from the Eurocentric forms of expression like Quilting. When first researching a medium of creative expression, Quilting became a strong contender since language as a potential barrier for sharing knowledge was largely eliminated, but ultimately we decided against it because it would have taken up a lot more time than the collaborators had.

Another text we read during our research phase after meeting the collaborators was chapter twelve of the book “Opening Up the University: Focus Pulled to Hungary: Case Study of the

⁸ Seppälä, Sarantou, and Miettinen, *Arts-Based Methods for Decolonising Participatory Research*.

OLive Participatory Video Workshop”⁹, a recounting of the OLlive Program, OLlive meaning Open Learning Initiative for Refugees and Asylum Seekers,¹⁰ in which the OLlive participatory video course at the CEU is used as an example for art-based inclusive story telling. The focus was to empower refugees and asylum seekers to exercise their agency in interacting with a creative medium. They were given a series of assignments intended to frame and showcase their own stories and narratives by using video cameras to reflect their experiences.¹¹ The stories were created by the refugees and asylum seekers themselves rather than about them, as is often the case. The text highlights the importance of an atmosphere that encourage the sharing of one’s story and insights and this in turn was what inspired us to focus on creating a safe space for the collaborators to share and create their own stories.¹² To create this kind of safe space for sharing we ended up looking into the suggestion of a Solidarity Circle¹³ by Umbreen and Sumbal in the forum post: “Follow-up on our workshop with SEEK + schedule for next week”.¹⁴ We decided to adapt it, but modify it with our own ideas, because we were not entirely sure how we could make the concept of facilitator work within the retreat design.

After figuring out what we needed to do and researching different methods of art-based storytelling, step two and three respectively, we finally arrived at the fourth step which entailed coming up with ideas that were achievable, so we met up on the twenty-fifth of march to brainstorm. We prepared a PowerPoint layout for the presentation in advance and started spit-balling ideas. Thankfully we were all well-prepared, which made the meeting go quite smoothly and allowed us to put together the retreat design as well as the presentation in under two and a half hours. It was the most productive and efficient group meeting I have

⁹ Cantat, Cook, and Rajaram, *Opening Up the University*, 192.

¹⁰ Cantat, Cook, and Rajaram, 193.

¹¹ Cantat, Cook, and Rajaram, 193.

¹² Cantat, Cook, and Rajaram, 203.

¹³ ‘Solidarity Circle: A Feminist Facilitator’s Guide to Creating a Safe Space for Young People’.

¹⁴ Strausz, ‘Follow-up on Our Workshop with SEEK + Schedule for next Week’.

ever been part of and I trace that back to us being prepared and having researched creative storytelling methods in advance on the one hand, and us already having worked together before on the other.

We took inspiration from various different sources while designing the retreat and meeting with the SEEK collaborators as well as our incredibly detailed and collective note taking during the meeting really paid off!

We decided to structure our presentation along the “6 details”¹⁵ and points discussed in the meeting with the SEEK collaborators, but decided to integrate them into three main themes: “Logistics, mode of expression and interactions, and documentation and dissemination”,¹⁶ since our notes on the meeting with SEEK were already structured in a very similar way.

Deciding what mode of expression to use was incredibly hard for us, because the SEEK collaborators’ personalities, skills and passions varied greatly. Thankfully Nimaya came up with the idea to do a workshop during which different forms of expression would be explored using the acronym CREATE. We already had the obvious ones, C for Collaging and A for Art, but coming up with the other modes of expression within the confines of the acronym was an incredibly fun exercise that stimulated our creative thinking! We came up with expressive writing for the first E and Examining and Reflection on the Jamboard for the second E, R for Recording and Theatre and Roleplay, which the SEEK collaborators mentioned enjoying during our meeting.

Since we put a lot of importance on creating a safe space for sharing, we were inspired to use a version of Umbreen and Sumbal’s suggestion of doing a Solidarity Circle and thought arranging the room in a circle would be a good place to start.¹⁷ Another important aspect we

¹⁵ SEEK, ‘Detailed Notes on Writing Retreat Preparation’.

¹⁶ Strausz, ‘Long and Important Note, Please Read’.

¹⁷ ‘Solidarity Circle: A Feminist Facilitator’s Guide to Creating a Safe Space for Young People’.

integrated into our design was the playing of music during breaks and the use of our anonymous document, which we both got from our (Mis)performing World Politics class! We thought it would be a good idea to let the collaborators choose their favourite music in an anonymous document to create a playlist that would later be played during workshop breaks to make the collaborators feel as comfortable as possible.

While thinking about the logistics of the retreat, we decided that it would be important for everyone to have access to a laptop or tablets which would require the collaborators to either bring their own or have one provided for them. They would also need speakers so they could play their music during breaks and of course sign consent forms for publishing photos, videos or art created during the workshop. Agreeing on a certain time for the workshops itself would be difficult, but we thought that early morning hours could potentially work if the workshop would be combined with breakfast. We decided on doing two separate sessions. One two-hour workshop during which the collaborators would be creating art based on their stories and another one-hour workshop at a later date to reflect on and share said art with the other collaborators. Furthermore, the choice of working in groups or individually would be left up for the collaborators so they could choose whether they wanted to share everything or only parts of their stories, depending on how comfortable they felt. If a collaborator stopped feeling comfortable at any moment, they could give a previously agreed upon sign or safe word to signal to others that they didn't feel comfortable continue sharing anymore.

We thought we could start the Workshop off with an ice breaker and by letting collaborators talk about their individual comfort foods. The idea was for the collaborators to bring pictures, recipes of their comfort foods and if possible, tell a story about why it is their comfort food and even bring some of it to share with the other collaborators. This too was inspired by our meeting with SEEK, but it could be potentially problematic in light of Covid-19 restrictions.

Another SEEK inspired practice we wanted to adopt in our retreat design was the use of Jamboards, since we thought it would be interesting to have the collaborators share their expectations prior to the workshop and it could simultaneously be used for documenting their later reflection on the workshops which could potentially make for an interesting comparison. We also came up with the idea to do a blog, because this way we could document the different modes of expression and bring them together in one place including things like texts, images and videos. Tizian came up with the idea of doing a tumblr blog which is an easy to use and accessible way of realizing this idea and created the tumblr page for SEEK called: Create your own stories.¹⁸ We further played with the idea of not just writing about the Workshop in the SEEK Newsletter and social media, but also sharing information about the Workshop through CEU's social media channels.

We had a lot of fun designing the retreat and the time we spent on creating the presentation and discussing ideas went by extremely fast compared to how much we prepared for it, most likely because we were so well prepared thanks to the (Mis)performing classes and SEEK meeting. I was incredibly proud to be part of this creative and hardworking group and was really happy with our results and teamwork!

On the twenty-ninth of march, we held the presentation for our retreat design which I hoped the SEEK collaborators enjoyed and found useful! We were excitedly writing on WhatsApp once we realised that another group had a lot of similar ideas to our own, which in a way can be seen as an affirmation of our ideas being good, and I was really happy with the feedback we received from SEEK! Our final exercise together using the Jamboards was a lot of fun and gave us the opportunity to say goodbye to each other and conclude the projects in a very

¹⁸ 'Create Your Own Stories'.

playful way that all of us enjoyed a lot! I had a great time and hope that SEEK picks some of our suggestions for their retreat.

Throughout this project I was able to track our progress with my timeline journal and keep the important information in one place. Being able to track our progress allowed me to feel a sense of accomplishment and appreciation for the little things we did in preparing for the retreat design. Being able to see the big picture and realise how far we have come has been a very satisfying experience for me! There are few things that bring me as much joy as organizing large quantities of information in a way that makes them easily accessible, understandable and thus useable both to me as well as other people which in turn taught me a lot about knowledge production and sharing just like creating the retreat design did.

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