Planning facilitation for online events

Holding people and space(s) online can be challenging for many facilitators despite the years of experience already doing it in physical events. There are some similarities, but still many more specificities that cannot be applied in the translation between the two. The space(s), setting, participation and general flow during and after the online event are specific for the digital realm. As part of your preparation for facilitating your online event, the key point to have in mind is how you will co-create and support the experience of being together in the shared space that is digital and real. Imagining that experience has many factors that should be taken into consideration, such as:

- The digital realm is another and distinct dimension of our reality, meaning that we perceive, process, feel, respond and experience it. It does not make us immune to vulnerability, nor does it remove the layers of our fragility. Quite the opposite, structural inequality, discrimination and exclusion are mirrored, present and oftentimes amplified in the digital realm.
- Technology, access and accessibility needs of your participants determine their participation by preventing, obstructing or supporting it.
- Non-verbal language and visual cues are limited. Also, camera sharing depends on your participants' choice or lack of that option, which makes it harder to read and adjust the energy in the shared space.
- The time needed to create connections between participants is limited, which would otherwise be nurtured at on-site, in-person physical events through socialising with one another.
- Social spaces have to be designed, the story around them created, and effort invested in encouraging engagement. Consider sharing songs, (art)work, and other content that can encourage connection.
- Protocols and tactics are needed both from facilitation and tech side as to respond in a timely manner to disrespect, harassment and violence.
- Additional materials have to be prepared in advance, including intructions and manuals for tools that will be used as to facilitate participation for all participants.
- If access is not an issue, online events can also have positive sides from the point of participation: the device can serve as a buffer for people to process new input without the pressure to respond immediately and they can adjust their pace of participation.
- Physical space for on-site events enables participants to feel mentally and physically away from their home(s). During online events, it's important to be creative and use your imagination to build the narrative for your event. This includes the story around the event, the purpose, as well as naming different channels of communication.

Example: Our Member convening in 2020 was to be hosted in Cuetzalan, Mexico. With the pandemic, however, we were only able to meet remotely, from our homes, offices and communities. So in the spirit of looking ahead and reimagining our world, we explored this beautiful Mexican town virtually by naming the meeting spaces inspired by the topology of Cuetzalan.