Student Reporters 2016

Final Report

Tropentag Conference

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Introduction

This year´s Tropentag was held at the BOKU-University (Universität für Bodenkultur) in Vienna, Austria, from 18th to 21st September 2016.

About 650 participants from all over the world discussed latest research results and future projects with regard to tropical and subtropical agricultural development during numerous panel discussions, workshops and poster sessions. This year´s theme of the conference and focus of the panel discussions was "Solidarity in a Competing World – Fair Use of Resources".

Tropentag is an important event when it comes to agriculture related development research, capable of bringing together scientists, government representatives as well as development organisations. The conference is organized annually by one European university in collaboration with ATSAF e.V. and a number of funders.

During the conference, a team of twelve student reporters from ten different countries accompanied the discussions and presentations as young journalists.

ATSAF e.V. gives young students of an agricultural science-related subject the opportunity of testing the work of a journalist under the conditions of an interdisciplinary conference. Prepared by a two-day workshop, the twelve students reported on the conference using a blog, Flickr, YouTube as well as social media.

There is more than one objective for ATSAF e.V. to invite twelve students as reporters. First of all, the student reporter´s output helps in promoting the Tropentag conference and is meant to be an additional source of input for participants and those following from afar. Furthermore, the student reporter´s platform offers an opportunity for reflection on the conference´s topic. As a side effect, the promotion of Tropentag serves as a means of drawing more public

attention to ATSAF´s work. Obviously, the student reporters are caught in multiple expectations on their work.

For a student reporter, the main aim is to learn more on journalistic working methods combined with an interest in the conference´s theme.

The following final report will sum up all activities fulfilled by the student reporter team during the Tropentag in Vienna. It will also offer a feedback on the preparatory workshops as well as on the conference from the reporters' perspective.

Student Reporters 2016

	First Name Last Name	Nationality	Study Program, University	Main Task at Tropentag
	Kristina Backhaus	German	B.sc. Horticultural sciences and area studies of Asia and Africa, Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany	Blogging, photography
	Laurin Berger	German	B. sc. Organic Agriculture; University of Kassel, Germany	Blogging, photography
	Michela Cannovale	Italian	M. sc. Agricultural Economics; Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany	Editor-in-chief, video

	Miranda Elsby	Canadian	M. sc. Agriculture for sustainable development; University of Greenwich, England	Blogging, photography
	Chidoh Kootlole	Botswanan	M. sc. International horticulture; Leibnitz University Hannover, Germany	Blogging, social media
	Isabella Lang	Austrian	M.sc. Organic farming Systems & agroecology; BOKU Vienna, Austria	Social media, photography, blogging
	Benjamin Poscher	German	M. sc. Tropical forestry management; Technical University (TU) Dresden, Germany	Blogging
	Gisela Quaglia	Argentinian	M. sc. Environmental protection & agricultural food production; University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Germany	Chief editor assistant, video
	Haruki Sakamoto	Japanese	M. sc. Sustainable Ressource Management; Technical University of Munich (TUM), Germany	Video, editing

	Lucia Carla Vogel	Bolivian	M. sc. Agricultural Development; University of Copenhagen, Denmark	Video, editing, blogging
	Thi Thi Hang Vu	Vietnamese	M. sc. International food business & consumer studies; University of Kassel, Germany	Editing, video, photography
	Fadli	Indonesian	M.sc. Agricultural Science & Ressource Management in the tropics and subtropics (ARTS); University of Bonn, Germany	Blogging, photography

Workshops in advance

A two-day workshop to introduce the student reporters to journalism in theory and practice took place in the BOKU University in Vienna on the 17/18.09.2016. Main teacher at the workshop was Ralph Dickerhof, freelance journalist who held the workshop for the student reporters team also the year before.

Saturday, 17.09

After introductions by ATSAF representatives to the initiative of student reporters and to the technical background of Tropentag 2016 by BOKU staff, the session was handed over to Ralph Dickerhof. Ice-breaking games helped in getting to know each other and starting the group dynamics. He proceeded to introduce his work and talking to the students about some general journalistic rules of news communication. We learned to

define the target group and the goals and expectations in terms of news covering. Ralph Dickerhof continued leading us through the first steps of organization. With his guidance, we decided on group division into written and audio-visual media and internal management by picking an editor-in-chief and a sub-editor-in-chief.

The second day of the workshop, the student reporters already started to organize the development first outputs such as introduction photographs and descriptions of the reporter team, first blog entries, flyers to distribute among Tropentag participants, and an introduction video for the conference opening session.

Two technical workshops were held, divided into written and audio-visual media. A technical introduction to blogging and social media was prepared by Mathias Strathausen. He showed some writing guidelines and guided the reporters team into the functioning of all media accounts, how to publish on the different accounts and how to create links among these accounts. The function of each media was covered. The technical introduction to video making and editing, instead, was held by Roland Altenburger, from Südwestrunkfunk (SWR), the German southwest broadcast. He taught the student reporters some basic rules of news video shooting, camera handling and interviewing rules and second to editing and post shooting. Further, Roland Altenburger provided some practical guidance for the first upcoming movie project of the team.

The way forward

After the feedback session, it became clear that time pressure and little guidance are intentioned by ATSAF as part of the learning process. Nonetheless, given the

little experience of the student reporters in the area, a feedback on the produced work would have resulted in guiding help and improved the learning outcome. In the feedback session, the idea was voiced that Ralph Dickerhof could be an advising contact person during the conference, at least on a part-time basis. Due to the little background on journalism, the student reporters need the maximum time as possible to start planning and experimenting with the new media. Also, due to the little background and the high time pressure, journalism theory was difficult to take in and learn in such a short time frame, despite of all participants' interest in the topic. Thus, the more practically oriented the workshop is, the quicker the learning outcome and the preparation will happen. As aforementioned, including Ralph Dickerhof part-time as an advisor in the first day of the conference, rather than solely as a lecturer, could help students in the future: learning-by-doing with an advisor. Similarly, the technical workshops were a crucial introduction for the functioning of the reporter team, nonetheless some technical barriers handling the video cameras could have been avoided with a technical contact partner to address.

Blogging

The 2016 student reporter blogging team consisted of 7 official members, with diverse academic interests, as well as photography experience and skills. Student reporters with other foci (editing, videography, social media) also contributed pieces to the blog. To prepare the team for the intensive few days of conference sessions and follow-up writing, presentations and guidance were given during the training portion of the student reporter experience. The students were exposed to best blog writing practices, which included journalistic themes, such as capturing the reader's attention with novel, relevant, and exciting titles. Students were also given administrative access to

the blog's website (http://blog.tropentag.de), and shown how to tag posts, embed photographs and media, and aesthetically format post layouts.

The team divided the workload by creating a timetable of the conference's oral sessions, poster sessions, and workshops. Each student volunteered for presentations that were of individual interest, while striking a balance between attending a variety of session topics and also maximising the number of presentations that were covered. This system was flexible, as one session may have been particularly inspiring to an individual, which therefore created more work and focus on producing a blog post for that one topic. Each student used their discretion in how many sessions they were able to accommodate each day, as attending every presentation was simply not possible. The team also prioritized coverage of keystone conference events (such as opening/closing sessions), as capturing the words and faces of keynote speakers was identified as a priority by ATSAF. Overall, the reporters were able to capture photographs of a large proportion of speakers, as well as cover a variety of topics.
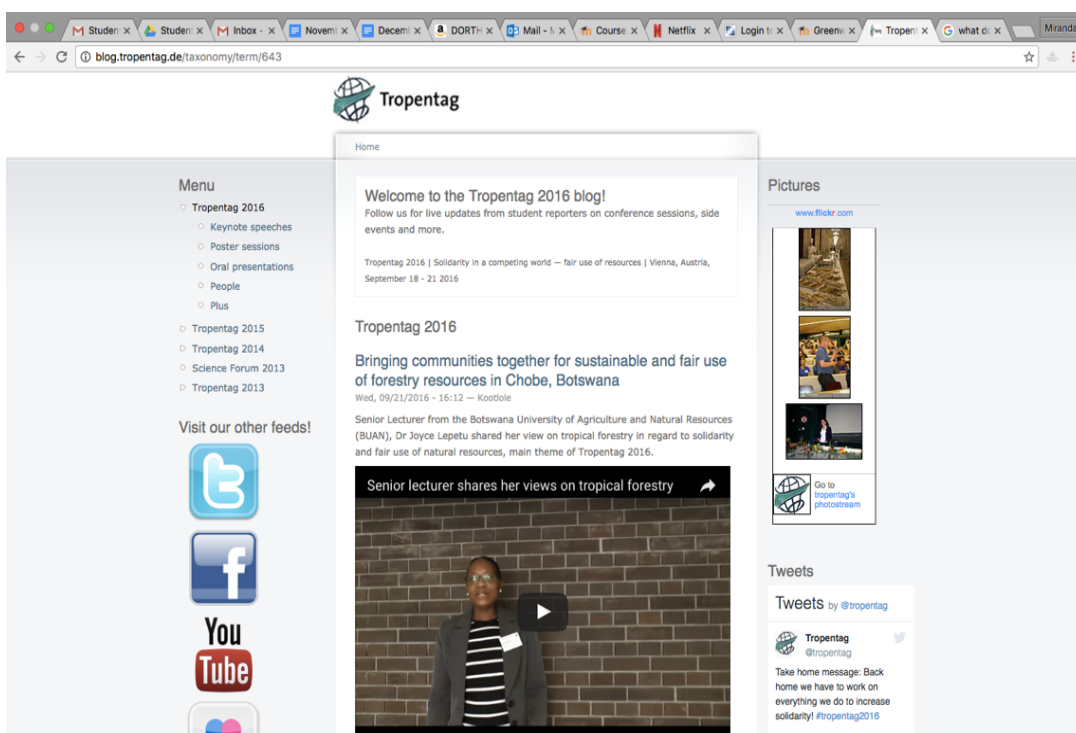
A snapshot view of the Tropentag 2016 blog homepage

In total, the student reporter team was able to publish 46 blog posts. These posts were divided into subheading on the blog's website, titled: *Keynote speeches*, *Poster sessions*, *Oral presentations*, *People*, and *Plus*. Each post was overseen and officially published by the team's elected editor-in-chief. It was pointed out that the team had a slow start in getting their first posts published, but the pace of uploaded posts increased steadily after the first day once students had familiarised themselves with the process and requirements.

A few concerns and recommendations were voiced during the feedback round which ended the conference. The students were at times confused as to the expectations of their writing, and whether their individual opinions/voices were welcome on the blog. It was also unclear if the organizers had a specific target in mind for the number of published posts. In future years, it may be helpful to voice these expectations to the student reporter group during the initial training/workshops, as well as set specific targets, as many people work well with goals in mind. It would also be helpful to more strongly suggest (or even make it a requirement) that students bring their own laptops, cameras, and photo editing software (or provide instructions on free trial downloads), as working with familiar equipment would help with efficiency during the tight schedule.

Photo

This year's team of Tropentag decided in the first meeting that no separate photo team would be formed. Although in the previous years fixed roles and responsibilities were distributed in relation to whom would take care of photography, this year's team decided that every student reporter, except for the video team, would take pictures while listening to the presentations and discussions. The decision was mainly based on the desire to represent most of

the diverse topics displayed in Tropentag, and this required a lot of manpower and having a photo group solemnly taking photos was seen as inefficient.

In regard to the way of taking pictures, few advices were given prior to the conference. Part of the information was given during the video editing preparation session, with the advice to move the object that should be photographed away from the frame center in order to increase the attractiveness of the photo. A photo in which the person of interest is displayed in the center was taught to be rather boring and unattractive. Some knowledgeable student reporters in the group shared the knowledge about technical issues, about how to handle the reflex cameras and how to get a good, sharp photo with the right contrast.

The main focus of the preparation lectures in regard to photos lied on the question regarding how to prepare and upload the photographs on Flickr. All student reporters learnt how to place the Tropentag banner in the photos, edit the size and upload the selection of photos to Flickr. Further the process of how to embed the photos from Flickr to the Tropentag blogs, tweets and Facebook posts was taught.

In total, a selection of exactly 350 photos was displayed on Flickr, available for everyone who was interested. The albums were opened 485 times, indicating a high interest in the uploaded pictures.

The solution of uploading the photos on Flickr and then linking it to the blogs, tweets and posts was perceived by the group as a good solution. At the end, the selection, preparation and editing of all the taken pictures went smoothly after the basic steps were known and processed rather automatically.

Overall, the decision to distribute the task of taking and uploading the pictures to most student reporters led to the high outcome that 350 pictures could be uploaded. The task of uploading the 350 pictures for two to three student reporters would have led to a very boring monotonous work, which was in this way avoided.

Beside the selected and uploaded 350 photos on Flickr, a much higher amount of photos was stored on a separate hard drive. These photos may further be used for editing and selection if specific photos are requested. The photos part was perceived by all student reporters as an interesting activity and should be seen as an essential part of the journalistic work of the student reporters.

Videography

After the introductory session by Ralf, the reporters were supposed to have an introduction to movie shooting and video making. However, due to the unforeseeable injury of a lecturer, they had a brief one-hour skype meeting. The lecturer explained the basics of making videos and provided with a pdf document that contains the topics discussed.

Before this skype call, student reporters have chosen who wants to do which part. Gisela, Lucia, Hang, Michela and Haruki formed the "Video team".

Since some members of the video team had an experience with video making and YouTube, the absence of the lecturer did not influence the productivity of the team.

Although Adobe Premiere was made available by ATSAF, the group decided to use Movie Maker as it is easy to use and has enough capacity to complete our tasks. Some of the group members used the software before. Therefore, they did not lose much time learning the software, which would have been unavoidable with an advanced software such as Adobe Premier.

The BOKU organizers suggested two lecture halls to use for the interviews. But after exploring the venue, the reporters found out a better location in hidden passages of the University. The corridors had a good background, on some spots had good light, and were more quiet that the other suggested places. A big part

of the interviews was conducted there, filming scenes with keynote speakers and other attendants of Tropentag.

Once the videos were made, they got uploaded on YouTube and then shared on the blog with an introduction text and/or shared on Facebook to increase the views.

During Tropentag (i.e. circa three days), 10 videos have been published, including a video used at the opening ceremony and another one used for the closing ceremony. 600 minutes of watch time and more than 500 views were collected.
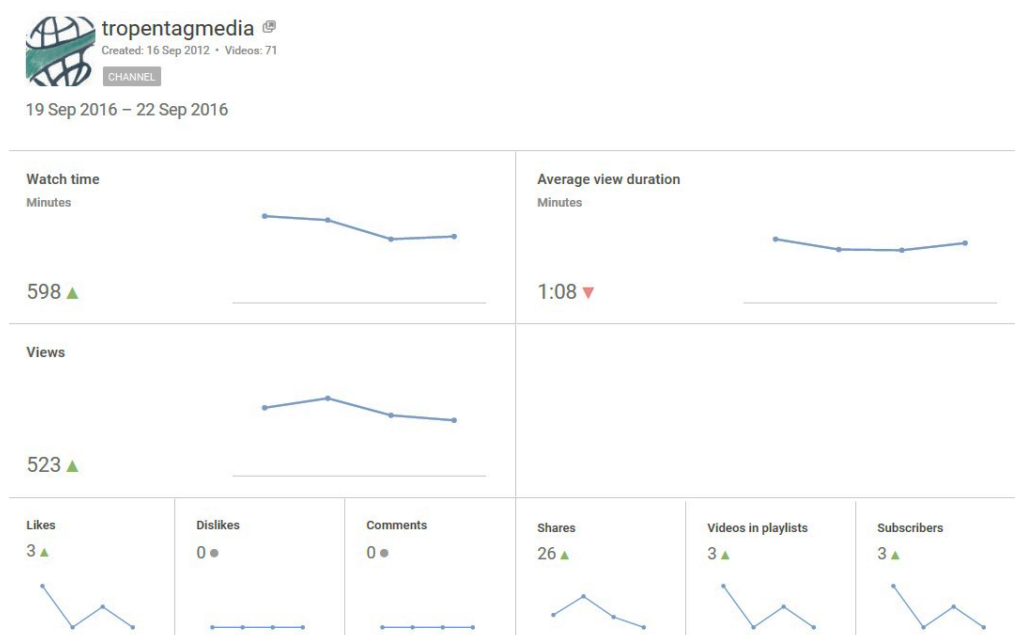

Tropentag on social media

Social media is an important tool in communication in our times. During big events like Tropentag, social media communication has several advantages. You get first hand, in time information, not only by the official press but by organizers, participants and social media officers. It is possible to share not only

thoughts and opinions, but also pictures and videos and therefore create a colourful and diverse picture of any given event. Obviously, the Tropentag follows this new development as it is running a Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Flickr account.

Facebook

As Facebook is the most common used social network worldwide, it is also the social media channel with the most 'friends' for the Tropentag – in total 1,699 (by 10.11.2016). The scope of the provided inputs and its development before and after the Tropentag is illustrated in the following graph.
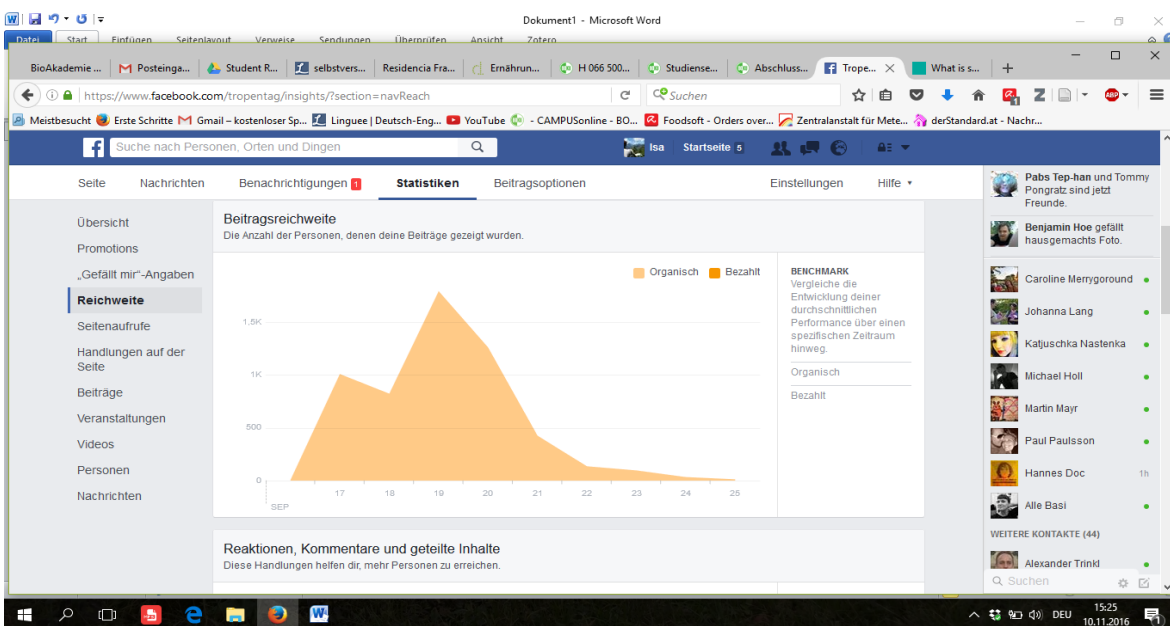

Quite an abundance of people started to visit the page several days before the event but after the event the interest dropped very fast. Therefore it is important for upcoming years to start with the social media activities at least 2-3 days before the event.

Twitter

The microblogging service provider Twitter plays also an important role, especially in giving real-time information and connecting with individuals

and/or organizations. The Tropentag account has 417 followers and follows itself 658 accounts.
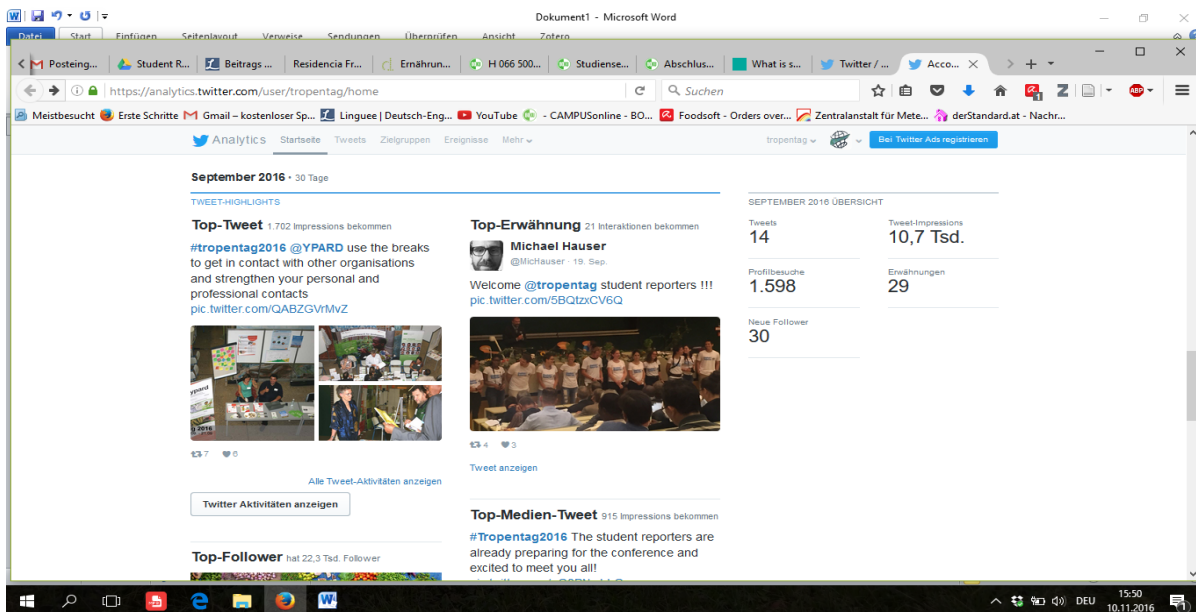
YouTube

The movie team was very active and uploaded 10 videos during Tropentag. It was a mixture of interviews and reports about the event. The views of the videos range from 22 to 157 (by 10.11.2016). The official channel which is called *tropentagmedia* is subscribed by 22 people in total. If we compare this with the other channels it can be noticed that it has by far the lowest scope of the social media channels. As filming and especially cutting of videos is a big working task and the scope is so low it should be rethought how to continue.

Flickr

A total amount of 3,313 pictures can be found on the Tropentag Flickr account (uploaded since 2010). Unfortunately, it is not possible to get any free statistics about picture views or profile visitors with the free version of Flickr. It can be said that there are 22 followers on the account but, probably, that there are multiple more picture views. Also without the

concrete statistics, however, Flickr is a popular tool and easy to handle tool for sharing pictures and therefor plays an important role within the social media activities of the Tropentag.

Links

https://www.facebook.com/tropentag/

https://twitter.com/tropentag

https://www.youtube.com/user/tropentagmedia

Pictures: https://www.flickr.com/photos/tropentag/

Profile: https://www.flickr.com/people/tropentag/

Conclusion and recommendation

First of all, thanks very much to ATSAF e.V. for providing us this opportunity! It is a great investment in young students and their future career perspectives. Thanks also to the organisers of the Tropentag 2016 in Vienna for making this event possible. And thank you, Elli, for your effort!

According to our own reflection as well as the feedback given by ATSAF, by the organisers at BOKU and by numerous participants, the student reporters activities were very successful during the year 2016. For us, it was an exiting, inspiring and, yes, stressful event. We learned a lot about the every-day life of a journalist – even though this happened more because of experience rather than lecture given during the workshops.

We all had probably very diverse expectations. Now we are aware that a student reporter will not be able to receive much input content-wise during the conference. Moreover, the job is harder than we probably expected and it is an

opportunity to experience journalism and test yourself. But we did it ourselves: the workshops were not that helpful in teaching journalism.

It was difficult to meet all expectations put forward to us by many stakeholders. Or maybe it is better to say: it was a difficult task for us to find out which expectations to meet and which ones we could not fulfill. Our objective was not clearly formulated enough in order to know what our task was. So: is it a service to the participants? Are we the publicity-section of Tropentag? Both were clearly denied by Folkard Asch during preparatory meetings, yet the expectations on our work by organisers and participants were different. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to decide as a student reporter what to do and where to say «Sorry, this is not my job!».

Moreover, we had to learn to prioritize our work, since we could not cover each and every event. Time management became a major task in order to find a good balance between generating output and maintaining a high quality.

Since most of us expected more theoretical input on journalistic basic capacities, we would suggest to invest more time in the theoretical preparation. A clearly stated introduction on the objective of our work, on the expectations and the experience by former student reporters would help in getting the start of our work more organized. Learning how to design a good article would be a helpful preparation in advance. Questions like these were addressed in the final workshop on *"The way forward to a professional career"*, which was great but would also fit in well into the preparation day.

All in all, the Tropentag 2016 was an extraordinary experience and a chance to find out more about journalism. The student reporters received good feedbacks on their work, which was perceived helpful and a good addition of value to the conference. It´s worth keeping this up!

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