



iConference 2020 Sustainable Digital Communities

23–26 March, 2020
Borås, Sweden

OSLOMET



iConference 2020 goes virtual

In light of ongoing global health developments related to COVID19, the University of Borås advised the iConference organisers on Monday against continuing with an in-person international gathering and argued instead in favour of a virtual format. Today, the Public Health Agency of Sweden has raised the COVID-19 risk level in Sweden from MEDIUM to VERY HIGH. At the same time many iConference participants have contacted us to let us know about travel restrictions, health concerns or concerns about having to be isolated before returning home because of the COVID-19 epidemic. Although Sweden is currently not as badly affected as some other regions, there is a risk that the situation can change rapidly. Many other conferences are taking similar measures to reduce risks to participants' health and security associated with international travel.

For these reasons the iConference 2020 organising team and the iSchools leadership have agreed to transform the conference from an onsite event in Borås into an interactive virtual event. The theme of our conference is Sustainable Digital Communities, and we now see this is an opportunity for the iSchools community to test a sustainable digital solution in response to a difficult situation. A large number of excellent papers and posters and other thought-provoking sessions have been included in the program this year. The papers will be published in the Springer LNCS proceedings as planned and the poster abstracts in the IDEALS proceedings. We want there to be a chance to get together to present and discuss as many of these intellectual contributions as possible.

The virtual conference will be an opportunity for the iSchools community to be among the pioneers in arranging a world-wide academic conference, with as many of the ordinary conference characteristics as possible. After all, we deal with people, technology and information – let us work together to do that in a new form. The iConference 2020 organisers have a good team to make this a reality, but we will need to rely on the support and good-will of iSchools all over the world.

We recognise that the trip has included financial commitments for hotels and travel. So far, unfortunately, the hotels in Borås have been reluctant to refund bookings. Resia has done what they can to negotiate with them to change their policies. We recommend that participants consult their insurance companies – this letter along with government and university travel restrictions may be useful in those conversations.

The conference will keep important features of a conference. The papers and abstracts will still be published in the proceedings, authors will have a chance to present their work and get feedback, and we aim to provide opportunities for both intellectual debate and social meetings. The virtual conference should enable normal conference interactions without the stress of travel, and without further risk of last-minute cancellation of the conference. We recognize that for a virtual conference

time differences will mean that sessions will not always be taking place during business hours. We will do our best to address this.

Below, we will attempt to answer some of the questions you most likely have.

We are disappointed not to be able to hold the conference we had planned in Borås. However, the circumstances force us into a situation that can also be an exciting chance to try out what may be a future way to perform sustainable conferences. We hope for the understanding, support and high competence of the iConference community and look forward to working with you on this to create an excellent iConference 2020.

The iConference 2020 organising team
iConf2020@hb.se

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY REGISTRATION?

The COVID-19 outbreak will have substantial consequences for the conference budget, as contracts have been signed and services already used. However, because the virtual conference does not include refreshments, the organisers will apply a 50 percent refund of the early registration fee to all participants (i.e., the new fees will be 3,000 SEK for regular attendees, 2,000 SEK for student attendees). All current registrations will be transferred into virtual registrations. One-day tickets will be transferred into full virtual conference registration. Those willing to forgo refunds may share their registration with one other person at their own institution. Let us know if you would like to make use of this possibility. Because of the exceptionally high workload of the organising team at the moment, refunds for those who want them will be accredited to participants' credit cards *after* the conference. We ask for your understanding.

Registered participants who for technical or other reasons cannot participate virtually can make use of an extended cancellation timeframe until March 18. The same cancellation rules as earlier will apply. In these cases as well, refunds will be made after the conference.

New participants will be offered the chance to register for virtual participation at the reduced fee. If you already cancelled your reservation but would like to renew it given the new circumstances, please contact us. We will announce when the registration system is open for new registrations.

Those who do not register will not have access to the conference sessions or the Springer proceedings.

HOW WILL THE VIRTUAL CONFERENCE HAPPEN?

We will work to create a virtual conference which allows for interaction and as much of the physical conference feel as possible. Primarily we will use the video conferencing system Zoom, which can run on a web browser or on a client that is easy to install. Zoom allows for both plenary sessions and meetings to take place, including for smaller groups in break-out rooms. Presenters who prefer so will be offered to pre-record their presentation for their session in Zoom and will then be present for Q&A in Zoom. The organisers will provide a conference app, *Conference4me*, which participants can use for asynchronous communication. Participants will need a stable Internet connection, a good headset and a web camera. Please see more information about systems requirements here:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/categories/200101697>

Information on technical requirements as well as further instructions to presenters and information about training to session chairs and organisers will be provided before the end of the week. The conference organisers will work with workshop and SIE organisers to find good solutions for the set-up of their sessions. More information will also be made available to all participants as we are working hard to get everything in place.