IDIMT 2020 - A Mixed Reality Conference and Mixed Feelings

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Information Management and Interdisciplinarity are two foundations of our modern society. The Iron Curtain fell in 1989 and as a consequence, academic institution initialized cooperation between Austria and the Czech Republic. In 1992 an agreement on a cooperation between the University of Economic Prague (VSE) and the Johannes Kepler University Linz (JKU) was agreed upon. As a result a small group of 14 scientists from VSE and the JKU held a workshop [Chroust-93q] in a small hotel in a small village in the Bohemian Woods in September 1993 (fig. 1).
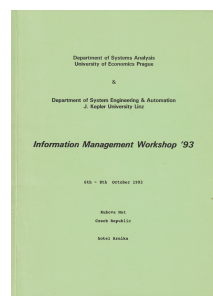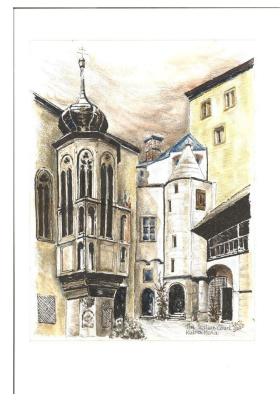

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Information Management Workshop '93

4th - 8th October 1993

Nabres Zei
Czech Republic

Hotel Ruzena

Fig. 1: IDIMT 1993 - cover

Both sides were rather unsure how to go about it: we tried to balance on all possible levels, the number of papers number, session chairs, and attendees, etc. etc. But the ice was soon broken, also thanks to a very cosy and well-equipped bar at the hotel. This event established a partnership which lasts until now [Chroust-17b]: In 2020 we held the 28th 'Interdisciplinary Information Management Talks' ('IDIMT') [Doucek-20e], a name which the Czech Co-Chairman Petr Doucek coined in 1994 (fig. 5). And it became a yearly event of growing size. In 2020, despite the Corona virus we had 100 participants, 43 submitted papers, 11 invited papers and proceedings of 500 pages.

The preparations usually start in October/November of the preceding year, and we believed that by September 2020 the Corona-problem would have gone away. It was not so.

Fig. 2: Kutna Hora, part of the Castle

The conference organizers decided still to hold the conference, it was scheduled for Sept. 2 to 4, 2020 in the historic town of Kutná Hora, the former treasure box of the Bohemian kings, due to the (now depleted) silver mines underneath the city.

The city offers the imposing St. Barbara dome, the old fortification and many historical buildings, cosy restaurants and wine cellars.

Fig. 4: Kutná Hora, 2 historic sights
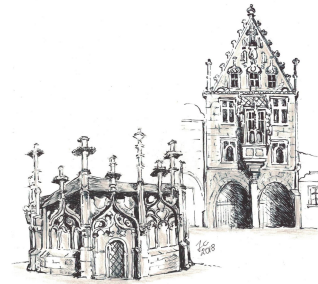

Fig. 3: St. Barbara Dome

But 2020 turned out to be different: What we did not expect in January 2020 was, that September travel restrictions and lock-down existed everywhere. So the decision was made to create a Mixed Reality conference: A small group of participants met in the anticipated location in Kutná Hora, a smaller group met in Vienna, connected via internet to Kutná Hora, and the other participants joined from their private home offices via their computers. Many of the real 'goodies' of IDIMT conferences were thus lost: no interesting sight-seeing, no opulent banquet, to private discussion with the other participants.
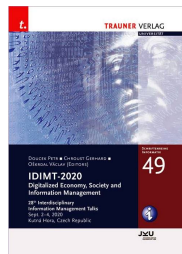

Fig. 5: IDIMt 2020 - proceedings

The topics chosen for IDIMT 2020 were:

- Innovation, New Business Models and Strategies

- Social Media, Privacy and Ethics

- Digital Economy and Industry 4.0

- Sustainability and Performance Management

- Smart Supply Chain

- Towards 2030 - Digital Transformation in Crisis Management

- Human and Cultural Impacts on Project Success

- Digital Security, Safety, Trust of Smart Systems - for a resilient Society

- People and Processes in Enterprise Software Development

- Cyber-Security and Digital Identities

The topics show the breath of the conference. The issues of Cultural Impacts were an important novum in providing a new aspect of human activities [Chroust-20h]. of the IDIMT conference.

And the conference took place! It was a learning effort and a new experience.

Some organizational problems dramatically show up, which in a true face-to-face conveence can easily be overcome and even camouflaged. A problem is that many participants did not have sufficient experience to handle unexpected situations of the actual conference tool. Additionally - in contrast to a face-to-face conferences - often nobody was there to help.

Another problem was that the session chair was not always the 'technical session master' to switch foils and switch speaker on and off .

To me one of the biggest disadvantage was that - in contrast to a face-to-face discussion, that you have a multitude of people in your audience to whom you speak, but you cannot directly focus on a singular individual, since the camera only provides a global view of all participants.

IDIMT has one rather unique selling point which make it special. After 3 or 4 papers all speakers are called to the podium to discuss with the audience and other speaker the issues of the just heard papers. In IDIMT2020 this did not work satisfactorily - but we will think of improvements.

But we are glad that we could have held our conference. And we hope that the next conference will be face-to-face again. Nevertheless we will keep a certain virtual environment for a few participants, who for various reasons are unable to attend the conference in person.

Thus the preparations for IDIMT 2021 are already n the way! And we invite the readers to join us in that conference. (contact: gerhard.chroust@jku.at).

Literatur

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