

Virtual Conferences: Experiences from ICLR 2020

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- ▶ ICLR was meant to be a physical conference held 26-30 April in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- ▶ In early March a decision was made to hold the conference virtually
- ▶ Design principles: Inclusive and Interactive
- ▶ Inclusive: asynchronous-first, extended live sessions, globally accessible, low cost
- ▶ Interactive: chat channels for each component, face-to-face, social meetups, self-organisation
- ▶ See https://medium.com/@iclr_conf/gone-virtual-lessons-from-iclr2020-1743ce6164a3 for reflections

Format

- ▶ Every paper had a 5min video associated with it. (Probably better than standing at a poster to get the “spiel”)
- ▶ Every paper had a chat room associated with it, for asynchronous interaction (RocketChat)
- ▶ Each day there were 5 2-hour-long poster sessions at time zones across the world. There were two live Q&A sessions with the authors of each paper on Zoom.
- ▶ Invited talks had a 30 mins Q&A afterwards

Experiences of a poster presenter

Miguel Jacques, CDT in Data Science

- ▶ I found the interactions via both RocketChat and Live Q&A to be quite pleasant and smooth. In one of my live sessions there were up to 4 people in zoom at once and it made for a very productive impromptu panel discussion.
- ▶ Another thing that I find easier in this format is exchanging information. I can very quickly lookup who someone I'm talking to is, if they have papers in the conference, or exchange information via the ICLR general chat.
- ▶ Another example is the ability to quickly send the link of a paper relevant to the current discussion to the people in the chat, which isn't so easy when talking in person.

Other Thoughts

- ▶ Need to defend time to attend conference (forward planning)
For ICLR the schedule was only made available the day before the conference started, which was not enough
- ▶ ACM Guide to Best Practices (thanks to Boris Grot)
https://people.clarkson.edu/~jmatthew/acm/VirtualConferences_GuideToBestPractices_CURRENT.pdf