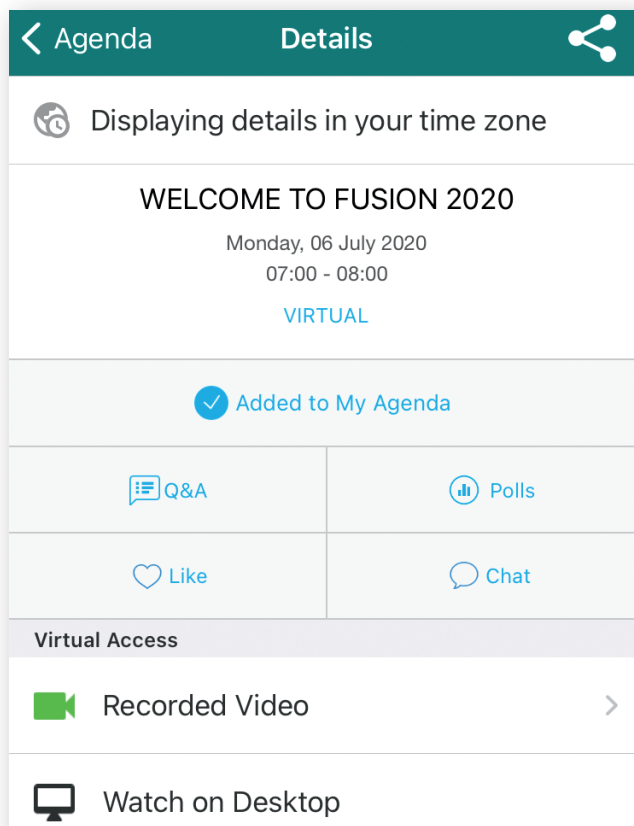# FUSION 2020 Report

REPORT ON THE 23RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INFORMATION FUSION

The International Society of Information Fusion (ISIF) hosted its 23rd International Conference on Information Fusion online from 6 to 9 July 2020. On 2 April 2020, ISIF Board of Directors, and the South African Local Organising Committee, in consideration of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, decided to proceed with the Fusion 2020 Conference hosted as a virtual online event.

Dr. Paulo Costa, the 2020 ISIF President announced "… witnessing the strong participation of our community, ISIF and the Fusion 2020 organization jointly opted for conveying the conference in a virtual format only, while keeping all the technical program intact."

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The programme did not deviate substantially from the original conference agenda, with the only component omitted being the social events. The conference was attended by 278 people, featured 16 tutorials, and 169 papers that were viewed by attendees from 24 countries.

TUTORIALS

Sixteen tutorial presentations were made available as a series of 20-minute video presentations to mitigate screen fatigue. The tutorial registration included access to prerecorded videos and two live Questions and Answers (Q&A) sessions of 40 minutes each to accommodate attendees from different time zones. The Eastern Sessions made provision for attendees from Australasia and Asia and the Western Sessions made provision for attendees from Africa, Europe, and the Americas.
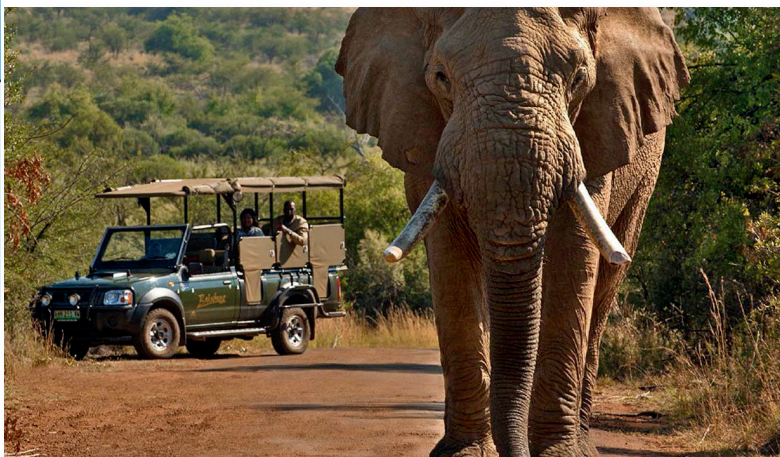
During each of these Q&A slots there were 20 parallel virtual rooms (one per tutorial), where attendees could drop in and out to ask questions. The tutorial material and presentations were released a week prior to the conference to allow attendees sufficient time to watch the videos before the live Q&A sessions on Monday, 6 July 2020. Lecturers reported active Q&A sessions, with a lot of participation from the attendees

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

The conference organisers decided to invite different keynote speakers than those that were originally scheduled to speak to better address the current concern of the COVID-19 pandemic. We wish to thank our keynote speakers for their inspiring words in the run-up to each conference day's proceedings and the very pertinent addresses considering the world-wide pandemic. This year's speakers were Maj. Gen. Johan Jooste, retired from the South African Army in 2006 after 35 years of active service on "Technology Makes Things Possible, Only People Can Make It Happen"; Dr. Jian Chen, the founder and CEO of CreditWise Technologies, Co. Ltd. on "Fusion of Finance and Epidemiology Models"; and Associate Prof. Kristian Soltesz with the Department of Automatic Control at the Lund University in Sweden on "Fusion in the Fight Against COVID-19: Possibilities and Limitations".

TECHNICAL PROGRAMME

The Fusion2020 technical program committee included eight members and was cochaired by Paulo Costa, Anne-Laure Jousselme, Thia Kirubarajan, Simon Godsill, Lyudmila Mihaylova, and Zhansheng Duan. It provided at least three expert reviews for each of the 230 submitted papers; many papers had more

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than three reviews. The result was 167 papers (with an acceptance rate of 73%). A complete list of presentations can be found on the Fusion 2020 conference website (fusion2020.org) and on IEEE Xplore.[1]
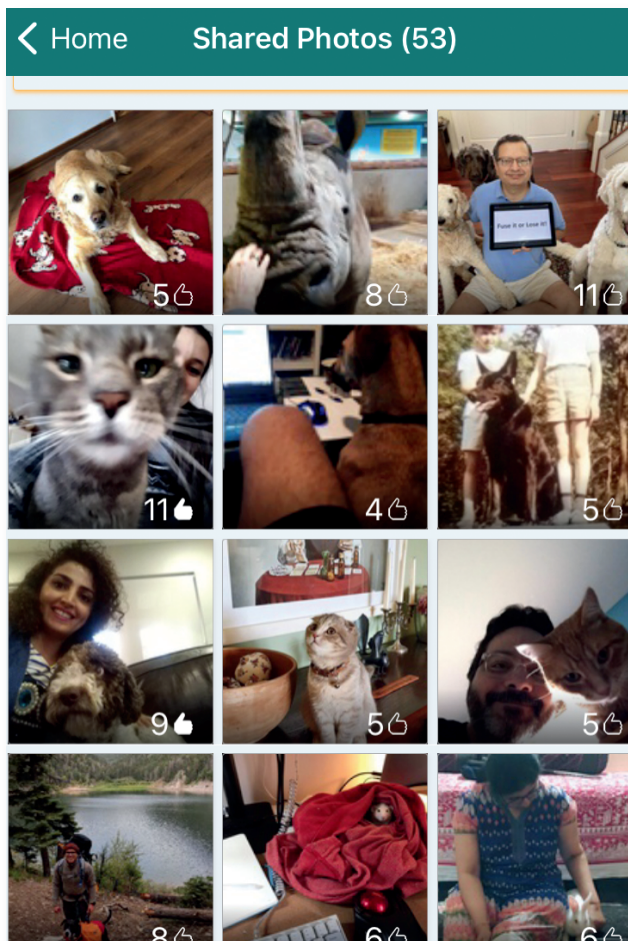
Each conference day consisted of three blocks of five parallel sessions. All presentations were prerecorded. The recorded paper presentations were released on the day prior to which the paper was scheduled to be presented. In so doing, attendees in all time zones were given the chance to view the presentation before a "live" Q&A session. Each block of sessions had a 20-minute live Q&A session which was divided into two sessions: an Eastern Session to accommodate attendees from Australasia, Asia, Africa, and Europe, and a Western Session to accommodate attendees from Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

ORGANISATION

All welcome addresses, awards sessions, and closing remarks were prerecorded and presented online. In closing, ISIF President Paulo Costa added:

"The online virtual conference still enabled us to experience tutorials, special sessions, regular sessions, keynote presentations, award ceremonies, participation in discussions, and other events that ordinarily form part of Fusion conferences— all at the level of quality we have been used to. Earlier in 2020 this outcome would have been considered unlikely, given the challenges and limitations imposed by the Global Pandemic. The ISIF Leadership was confident, and today we can report on our very first virtual Fusion conference that turned out to be an extremely successful event. The community showed its support, and the Fusion 2020 organization committee excelled—Pieter de Villiers, Fredrik Gustafsson, Alta de Waal, and the entire team did an excellent job. We end this conference with a message of hope. There is much uncertainty in what may await us in the year ahead, but this conference showed

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[1] https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/xpl/conhome/9183728/proceeding

us that we can face great challenges and emerge stronger. I look forward to seeing all of you next year in South Africa!"

BUILDING ON PAST EXPERIENCES

The success of the online conference can be greatly attributed to a vibrant information community that attended the event, and a local organising committee that spent many hours considering and implementing solutions for the best possible online conference experience. All of us have attended past Fusion conferences and our aim was to offer nothing less than an event of technical excellence. We wish to thank all our committee members and other volunteers for their selfless contributions in time and expertise, and the assistance from past organisers whose input was truly invaluable. Nothing can unfortunately replace the social aspect of an on-site conference, even with initiatives such forums for special interest groups and the fun pets photo competition! We hope that you will be able to join us for Fusion 2021 at the Sun City Conference Centre in South Africa, from 1 to 4 November 2021, where we intend to make up for lost social and networking opportunities.