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Bled eConference through Time - (INTRO)

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Bled eConference through Time

The first conference was held in 1988 when the then School of Organizational Sciences of the University of Maribor organized the 1st Consultation Meeting on Electronic Data Interchange.

Dr Jože Gričar is the initiator and founder of the conference. With his vision, persistence, extraordinary will power and international connections, he gradually turned the consultation meeting on electronic data interchange into an internationally recognised and established e-commerce conference. Bled eConference is among the most important European events discussing the impacts of modern information and communication technologies on organizations, citizens, government, educational institutions and the society as a whole.

The third consultation meeting was the first one with international participation. In 1991 the meeting was renamed into the »Electronic Data Interchange Conference«. 260 participants from 15 countries participated that year and presented 56 research papers. Thus, the conference paved its way to becoming an internationally established event, and its professional and scientific importance continues to grow.

In 1993 the conference was renamed into the »International conference on electronic data interchange (EDI) and interorganizational systems (IOS)«. The conference has been held at Bled annually since its beginning, thus it became known as the Bled Conference in 1997. Due to development trends its official name was changed again the same year to »International Bled Electronic Commerce Conference«, and in 2005 it got its current name, i.e. the Bled eConference, due to the fact that its scientific scope is becoming broader each year.

Since 1995 the conference has been building its scientific excellence by concluding strategic agreements with established journals and organizations working in the field of ICT and e-commerce.

The conference has featured research papers since the first meeting in 1988, and since 1995 they have been reviewed anonymously by at least two reviewers (double blind review). The quality of reviews is of great importance to every conference community. The Bled eConference has about 200 reviewers who review the submitted research papers every year. The »Outstanding Paper Award« has been awarded since 1999 by a special conference committee, consisting of Dr Roger Clark (the Committee Chair), the Research Track Chair, the Research Track Co-chair, and the Conference Chair. The committee evaluates all presented papers, which usually differ greatly in terms of contents and methodology, and awards the paper that demonstrates specific academic and presentation qualities and clearly contributes to the general understanding and progress of e-commerce.

Based on opinions given by reviewers and the Research Track Chair, around 50 percent of research papers submitted to the reviewers are accepted into the conference program. Thus, between 40 and 50 papers are presented at the conference and published in conference proceedings every year.

All conference papers have been catalogued in the Association of Information Systems Electronic Library (AIS) since 2001, and in the ISI Conference Proceedings Citation Index – Thompson Reuters since 2008, which demonstrates their high quality.

From 1995 to 2004 the conference had a strategic agreement with the International Journal of Electronic Commerce (IJEC), which published special annual issue dedicated to the Bled eConference. In total, 40 papers were published in special issues during that period, which proves the visibility of the conference. In 2006 the conference entered into a contract with Electronic Markets - The International Journal on Networked Business, a leading journal in the field of e-commerce, which is indexed in the international Social Sciences Citations Index (ISI - Institute for Scientific Information). Each year, the authors of accepted papers are invited to submit extended versions of their papers to be reviewed and published in the special journal issue dedicated to the Bled eConference. In 2009 the conference also started cooperating with the Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce.

The fact that conference papers are catalogued in international electronic libraries, and that the conference has annual agreements with leading scientific journals, is of utmost importance to participating researchers, as it increases the visibility of their research work and contributions at the global level.

In addition, the conference has been encouraging student research since 1992. Dr Rene W. Wagenaar has brought a group of three students to Bled in 1992 for the first time. After the conference, they have taken one of the University of Maribor students to the Erasmus University in Rotterdam (Rene's university at that time) for two weeks. That has meant a major change in a way we were involving students into the Bled eConference program since then. One of the results was a formalization of the prototypes presentations, named "Students Bazaar" in recent years. From 2007 on, the ePrototype Bazaar of the annual Bled eConference is named in Rene's honor. Nowadays the three-member program committee, consisting of Dr Harry Bowman, Dr Johan Versendaal and Dr Ronald Batenburg from the Netherlands, explained the importance of the ePrototype Bazaar: „Since 2007 the student bazaar has been attracting students who come from different countries to present innovative and advanced prototypes and business models in the field of e-commerce. More than 50 highly motivated students have presented their work at the bazaar over the last five years. Their appearance before an international audience and international competition made their experience even greater and encouraged them to pursue further education and career goals.”

In 2011 the doctoral consortium, which had been initially held and organized by Dr A. Milton Jenkins, was reinstated as part of the conference. It is now organized by Dr Douglas Vogel and Dr Heinz Drecher, and gives doctoral students the opportunity to present their doctoral dissertations in progress to the international academic community and get high-quality feedback and advice on further work.

A special feature of the conference is that it encourages the participation of university and research organizations representatives as well as other professionals and representatives from companies, government institutions, information technology, solutions and services providers, and other members of the public. They participate in panels, meetings and workshops to discuss the impacts of modern information technologies, solutions and services in the information society.

Since 2009 the Faculty of Organizational Sciences of the University of Maribor and the Bled eConference have been jointly organizing an international summer school which has about 15 participants from all over the world each year.

Today, the Bled eConference is a traditional internationally renowned event organized by the Faculty of Organizational Sciences of the University of Maribor. It is held every June at Bled and has around 150 participants coming from more than 25 countries around the world every year. The conference brings together representatives of different organizations, universities, governments and e-solution providers. Its program is prepared in cooperation with the international program committee. Every year, they choose a new working title for the conference, based on current research trends in the field of utilization of modern ICT and other solutions in organizations, government, universities and society as a whole.

With this special issue of proceedings, dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Bled eConference, we wish to thank everyone who contributed in any way to the creation of the program and the development of the conference as well as all sponsors who have supported the conference since its beginning.

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