

## Evaluative Report: ISDC2018 in Iceland (by Roberta Spencer and Erik Pruyt)

### 1. Iceland & Reykjavik

Roberta's impression: "I think Iceland captures people's imagination. When I mention Iceland, people say it's on their 'bucket list' to visit. The airport is 45 minutes from Reykjavik, an easy access bus at the airport and a ride through lava fields [€20-25]. You can see the mountains in the distance, but everywhere else is flat, a stark and harsh landscape with very few trees. Somehow the openness and barren landscape makes it interesting and beautiful to look at. Then out of nowhere, is a home. I experienced all seasons in the 5 days I was in Iceland; in varying temperatures there was sun and clear blue sky, rain and fog, snow, and a blinding blizzard, all with a consistent wind. There is a lot of space so the city is very spread out and there are a lot of highways. There are bicyclists, but not too many. There are pianos and swimming pools everywhere. [...] Everyone speaks English and there is no problem at all using credit cards everywhere I went."

Erik's impression: "This is the second time I stayed in Iceland. It's one of the most beautiful countries in the world with great geothermal pools everywhere. I love it!"

### 2. Dates

We have been focusing on the period 5-9 August 2018, since July is the main tourist season. Last week we found out, though, that there is a national holiday on August 5-6 2018. The university restaurant will be closed on these days (see below).

### 3. Venue & meeting facilities

The University facilities are logistically sound for our conference. The university venue is about 1.2-1.5 km walking to/from the city center and from one of the main conference hotels. The other hostel we can fully book is situated right next to the conference venue (well situated for those who have trouble walking distances). The conference venue itself is beautiful and functional, with many (relatively large) lecture rooms, a student restaurant, a burger basement, a bar, *et cetera*, in different buildings connected by means of great hallways and open spaces (which we can use for posters, coffee breaks,...).

However, the university does not have rooms of more than 300 persons. Adjacent to the University there is a very large plenary room though. This plenary room, with 900+ seating capacity, is a large multi-purpose theater. It is expensive though.

We reviewed Room Use spreadsheet and came up with a clear schedule and good estimate on cost of all meeting rooms (all AV is included). Classroom prices are fixed and relatively high (see [http://www.hi.is/adalvefur/utleiga\\_a\\_stofum](http://www.hi.is/adalvefur/utleiga_a_stofum)), yet manageable. If paid through the University, there is a 25% discount though. The big plenary room is the most expensive room. For the budget, it is best to minimize the use of the plenary room (e.g., by using the plenary room only during the first 2.5 hours in

the morning). Another option is to use a university plenary room that holds 300 people and video-stream the plenary session into a second 180-person room (à la Keble College). The large plenary room is adjacent to the University campus but not a university building. Using two large meeting rooms would be less expensive and closer to the parallel rooms, food, common spaces, etc.

There is free space at the University for the Poster Symposium which accommodate about 60 posters (at no cost). The physical set-up for posters is to use a long, existing wall which is poster-ready. If needed, we can rent 20 to 40 additional poster boards at a reasonable price. This means we have the flexibility to organize either one big poster event or poster events during coffee breaks.

The University space can accommodate the students on Sunday to hold the PhD Colloquium and a room for the Policy Council. However, lunch cannot be provided on Sunday August 5 by the university restaurant services. We might organize this differently though, for instance with food bags, food trucks, or a caterer. Instead of organizing the PhD colloquium at the university, we might also organize it at the main conference ho(s)tel, the Oddson ho(s)tel (see below).

There are display monitors to list the schedule, located in the conference space. There is internet everywhere (Eduroam). We can arrange complimentary internet access for participant who are not connected to eduroam and exhibitors at the cost of about \$500.

The best lay-out of the exhibitor space needs to be determined. There are two levels where exhibitors could set up. Tables and electricity will be supplied by the University. Some of the open spaces can be used for the MAW and other group events. The rathskeller can be used for a “Modeling Camp” or “Modeling Circus”.

Lunch on-your own will work on Tuesday-Thursday – there is a canteen/sandwich shop, a separate salad bar and a burger rathskeller. These three areas will provide enough lunch options in a timely fashion for all participants. A food truck has been discussed as another food option. Sunday and Monday are national holidays, which means we need to organize lunch differently. Sunday seems manageable, either at the university or at the Oddson ho(s)tel. Monday is more problematic and still needs to be addressed by the local team: we have to find a caterer or food trucks that are willing to sell food to us. Coffee and tea has been solved.

The coffee breaks will be set up near the exhibitors. Coffee/tea and water is included in the budget.

We will soon receive a full quote from the University, that includes the list of rooms, capacity, schedule and location in the two adjoining buildings (Háskólatorg and Oddi).

Thursday might be hosted either in the same building which would host the main conference, or alternatively, in the faculty of engineering. The same options apply to the summer school.



Main University of Iceland Building



one of the 120 seat parallel room



Possible 900+ Plenary Room adjacent to the University



60 seat parallel / meeting room (policy council?)



Poster Wall in one of the connecting hallways, connecting: Open Meeting Spaces with tables with power outlets





Common Room / Lunch Area, possible exhibitor area



Rathskeller – food and meeting spaces (with bar, burger restaurant, stage, and large projection screen),



Level with parallel rooms, possible exhibitor spaces

#### 4. Accommodations

The main concern relates to affordable ho(s)tels. This seems to be caused by the entrance of a new airline (WOW air) which offers very cheap flights to Iceland (from both sides of the Atlantic), while hotels have not been able to expand yet to satisfy the increased demand for rooms. As a consequence, hotel rooms have become very expensive. Note however, that many new hotels are currently under construction. Indeed, boom and... It has also resulted in the rapid expansion of AirBnB – many investors are buying houses to rent them to tourists. This means that, for a small city like Reykjavik, there are

many large AirBnB options at reasonable prices. Hotel prices are not reasonable though (except for good individual deals). Luckily, there are two interesting opportunities for us to book hostels:

- 1) The University Gardur Hostel ([www.studenthostel.is](http://www.studenthostel.is)), situated on the university campus (Hringbraut 29), can accommodate 86 persons in 43 twin rooms with shared bathroom facilities, common rooms, and common kitchens. We can book the whole place. The summer 2017 prices for the twin rooms are 6400 ISK (~\$60) (sleeping bag) or 8900 ISK (~\$84) (with linen included). These prices will probably rise about 1000 ISK next year. They can provide breakfast vouchers in collaboration with Háma – the university cafeteria for an additional price.
- 2) We can make a block reservation for all rooms in the Oddson Hostel (<https://www.oddsson.is/>), which is situated 1.5km from the university, at the waterfront (Hringbraut 121). The Oddson has a very nice atmosphere. It offers (read: mixes) a wide range of room types (and prices), has two restaurants (one of which is vegetarian), a bar and café, large communal areas, terrace with jacuzzi, *et cetera*, which makes it an ideal conference ho(s)tel. At this moment, Oddson can accommodate about 225+8 persons: there are 6 hotel double rooms (40100 ISK ~ \$378), 7 hostel single rooms (16200 ISK ~ \$153), 27 hostel double rooms (8 of which can accommodate another bed) and 4 hostel twin rooms (24700 ISK ~ \$232 per room), as well as 4 6-person bunkbed dorm rooms (8300 ~ \$78 per bed), 10 8-person bunkbed dorm rooms (6900 ~ \$65 per bed), and two 12-person bunkbed dorm rooms with shared bathroom facilities and a common kitchen. Prices are likely to increase by 10%, but through our block reservation, we would get a 10-15% reduction in price. Linen is included in the price. Ear plugs are provided free of charge. The ho(s)tel might be expanded/expanding with many 2 person rooms (two floors are currently occupied by an art school, which will relocate, after which these floors will be turned into 2-person ho(s)tel rooms). The Oddson is also willing to host a buffet dinner for 450 persons with about 150-200 seated and the rest standing, as well as the PhD colloquium with a lunch for 100-150 persons, and a Sunday reception for 250+ mixed seated and standing at set prices.

Right now, the overall idea would be to take over the Oddson hostel and have the PhD Colloquium and hold the conference banquet in their very large common spaces and dining spaces. If all Sunday activities and the Conference Dinner would be organized at the Oddson Hostel, then this location would become the hub of the conference. The local team will ask a quote from them for the Sunday activities and Tuesday evening banquet dinner. We discussed these ideas with the manager. We also discussed that prices would have to meet our budget. The manager said the food served could be chosen such to meet our budget constraints. Note that, if we held the PhD Colloquium at the Oddson, the Sunday University facilities costs would be deleted from the budget.

Both the Oddson and Gardur hostels are clean, convenient, have very nice community kitchen spaces and gathering rooms. It's a nice, casual atmosphere. This means that, so far, we have been able to secure rooms for 225 + 86 participants. It would be most similar to Keble College, but these hostels would handle sleeping room bookings, not the Society.

Apart from these hostels, there are many large AirBnB houses and apartments. If we decide to go to Iceland, then large groups (like Delft, Nijmegen, MIT, the student council, etc.) need to be asked to rent large AirBnB houses and apartments too.

Note that we will **not** be able to get a block of affordable **hotel** rooms. There is a Radisson hotel just next door to the University. We presented a proposal to have the dinner at this hotel coupled with a reduced guest room rate. The best the Radisson could do at that time was \$300 for a sleeping room. These prices are the highest we have ever seen for a conference. As long as the new hotels do not open, we should not expect these prices to go down. However, if they open, there might be opportunities for conference participants. Currently, this should not be counted on.

In addition to the Oddson and Gardur, we need at least another hostel. The local team is continuing to look into other hostel options (and other options, like the camping site for students) in the city of Reykjavik. The local team will check with the Tourist Bureau to see whether they can be of use (without burdening the budget).

The local team will send all accommodations information so that the conference website can have an accommodations grid showing locations with costs and distances.

## 5. Society Budget

The budget works with the **registration fee** for a member at \$600 and for a student at \$285. At the current exchange rate, the conference budget then shows a revenue of \$25,000. This is subject to change as information is still coming in. The budget is also a bit conservative as it does not take into account the 25% discount on the room prices yet. Given the registration fee and the costs of the meeting rooms, the budget works if we do **not** have afternoon plenary sessions, but instead twin plenary sessions similar to Delft 2014.

We confirmed all per person costs for food, set a maximum for the banquet dinner, etc. However, as for now, there is no budget reserved for: break food, food at an evening Poster Symposium, satchels, welcome reception. These items will be added if sponsors are willing to sponsor one or more of these items. The local team will look for sponsors. If there are no sponsors, these items listed above will not be included in the conference.

The local team will define a line item for local support (currently \$8100). We talked about how other universities organized local host commitments and sponsors, how the budget is the 'contract' and how the conference is constrained by costs and organizing staff. We reviewed the MOU revenue sharing plan. The local team will make a university account to assure the 25% discount and to receive any local sponsorship. We still need to clarify who is financially responsible at the university and who will sign the 'contract' as we need a signature associated with the university.

An important question the sub-committee and policy council needs to address, is whether exchange rate risks will be taken or hedged. The Icelandic Krona is rather volatile.

## **6. Total costs for Participants**

Conference registration fees would be a little higher than usual, but overall, this is a minor cost addition for conference participants. Air travel to Iceland has become much cheaper thanks to WOW air. WOW air is also willing to offer even better rates for conference participants. Booking in advance is important though. But the main cost for most participants relates to accommodation. Due to these cheaper flights, hotel prices are very high. Moreover, Iceland is an expensive country, especially at the current exchange rate. Overall, total costs for participants can be kept affordable though if we block reserve the Oddson and Gardur hostels, book AirBnB, and if (most) participants are willing to share rooms.

## **7. The Local Team**

The local team is composed of Harald Ulrik Sverdrup and Anna Hulda Ólafsdóttir. It is a pleasure to work with Anna and Harald. They have dozens of students taking System Dynamics courses as a required course for engineering and as an elective. A University ally is Hilmar Bragi Janusson, dean of the technical and natural sciences at the University of Iceland. He is an important internal ally and eagerly encourages the local team to get the conference to Iceland.

Anna and Harald would like to request one plenary session with/on Icelandic work. We informed them that program issues are decided (and therefore need to be discussed) by the program chairs. The local team has a vision for this conference to bring good examples of applied System Dynamics from solving of real life problems and show applications from in industrial production, resource management public management, defence planning and other aspects of daily running of society, including addressing grand challenges ahead of us, to the conference.

## **8. Conclusions**

The facilities and conference budget can work.

The dates we have have focused on are 5-9 August 2018. These dates are not entirely fixed yet. The food issue on Monday still needs to be addressed...

The program schedule would be somewhat different (plenary sessions would be 'twin' or video streamed in two large rooms).

The biggest challenge is the accommodations. Affordable, but mostly shared, accommodations will work if we take over two (to three) hostels and go bigger than before in terms of AirBnB. Construction is widespread building more hotels. The capacity will definitely increase by July/August 2018. Prices of hotel rooms elsewhere may or may not be affected.

The location of the banquet still needs to be determined. This could be at Oddson, but if sponsorship money would be available, then we might also go to spectacular venues.