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Preface: CERME 12 in virtual Bolzano

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The Conferences of ERME (European society for Research in Mathematics Education) have been held roughly biannually since 1998. The core of the conference is the *thematic working groups* (TWG) in which new, related research studies are discussed, based on papers which participants read in advance. While this format has remained almost unchanged since 1998, the scale and scope of CERME have developed considerably over the years: from 120 participants and 7 TWG at CERME 1, to 915 participants and 27 TWG at CERME 12. Moreover, CERME has gone from being a mainly regional congress (with only a few participants from other continents) to being a truly global event in mathematics education research, known for fostering high quality scientific communication, cooperation and collaboration. At CERME12, no less than 48 nations were represented (Table 1).

At the same time, it is evident that CERME12 was a very special – and historically difficult – congress to organize. It was first scheduled for February 3-7, 2021. In May 2020, the ERME board announced its decision to postpone the congress by one year, due to the then roaring outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, large parts of the world – and most of Europe – continued to experience lockdowns and restrictions that would have made the scheduled congress impossible. Instead, an online *Pre-CERME12 event* was organized in February 2021, hosted by the Institute of Education at University College London, and made possible by the tireless efforts of the team led by Jeremy Hodgen and Eirini Geraniou (also chair resp. co-chair of the IPC of CERME12). The Pre-CERME12 event allowed the 27 TWGs to meet and prepare for conference, now postponed to 2022.

The biannual General Assembly of ERME was also held during this event. We warmly thank Susanne Prediger for her service as President of ERME from 2017 to 2021! Her leadership also contributed crucially to the organisation of CERME12, and thus to the results presented in these proceedings.

During the summer and fall of 2021, we all continued to plan for CERME12 as an onsite event in Bolzano, Italy. The YESS summer school was held near Bolzano in August, with great success. More than 700 papers and posters were submitted for CERME12 in September. But in November 2021, new and unknown variants of the virus appeared. Their alarming spread forced us to reconsider the situation. Finally, the LOC, the IPC and the ERME board jointly decided that CERME12 would be held as an online congress, as announced in a mail sent to all members of ERME on December 1st:

It is with great sadness that we must communicate a decision which is forced upon us by the current developments of the COVID epidemic in Europe, and which has been taken by the ERME board in full agreement with us: CERME12 will be organized by the Bolzano team as an online conference, on the same dates as originally foreseen. For a long time we hoped for the much desired possibility of having the first CERME in three years as a normal, face to face event. Organizing a virtual CERME – which we will strive to hold as much “CERME spirit” as possible – will be a very demanding task, both in terms of finding good technical solutions, and in terms of organizing the programme and preparing the many TWG teams in a good way.

Germany	209	Turkey	15	Iceland	3
Norway	85	Ireland	13	Lithuania	3
Italy	81	Czech Rep.	11	New Zealand	3
Spain	62	Slovakia	11	China	2
Sweden	62	Chile	9	Colombia	2
USA	41	Brazil	8	Hong Kong	2
UK	38	Croatia	8	Poland	2
Israel	31	Finland	6	Algeria	1
Netherlands	26	South Africa	6	Egypt	1
Denmark	24	Switzerland	6	Faroe Islands	1
France	21	Australia	5	Malta	1
Austria	20	Malawi	5	Romania	1
Canada	19	Mexico	5	Russia	1
Greece	19	Belgium	4	Thailand	1
Portugal	17	Japan	4	Tunisia	1
Hungary	15	Cyprus	3	Ukraine	1

Table 1: The success of CERME12 in numbers – 915 participants from 48 countries

Indeed, it took a unique *tour de force* for all organisers to prepare – in just two months – an online version of CERME, based as it is on group work and interaction, rather than on one-way presentations (which are relatively easy to transmit online). These effort was crowned by the best success the new conditions could possibly allow: an online congress with more participants than ever, with virtually no technical problems, and not least with a high level of participant satisfaction.

In the history of ERME, CERME12 will be remembered as a scientific highlight during the long and hard pandemic. First of all, that is due to the plenary speakers and panelists, and to the contributors of papers and posters. Your efforts shine through the quality of the scientific texts offered by these proceedings. ERME, as a society of scholars, was not stopped – hardly delayed – by the pandemic, thanks to your ingenuity and unfailing determination to do and share first class research.

The realization of CERME12 was made possible also by the many people who organised the congress, under the difficult conditions alluded to above, namely:

- The Local Organizing committee, led by Giorgio Bolondi and Federica Ferreti, and all of the Bolzano team, including also the technicians who made the online congress run smoothly;
- The International Programme committee, led by Jeremy Hodgen and Eirini Geraniou;
- The leader teams of all 27 Thematic Working Groups.

For all your tireless and unselfish work during the three years between CERME 11 and CERME 12, the community owes you immense and extraordinary gratitude.

And the story goes on: ERME invites all interested researchers to CERME 13 (Budapest , Hungary, July 2023), and after that, to CERME 14 to be held in *real* Bolzano in February 2025.