

Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System

– the current state

27 April 2021

SIOS – an international partnership of research institutions studying the environment and climate in and around Svalbard to

- *Develop an efficient observing system*
- *Share technology, experience and data*
- *Close knowledge gaps*
- *Decrease the environmental footprint of science*

The Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System (SIOS) is a collaborative effort to develop and maintain a regional observational system for long-term measurements in and around Svalbard, addressing Earth System Science (ESS) questions related to Global Change. The observing system and research facilities offered by SIOS build on the extensive observation capacity and diverse world-class research infrastructure provided by many institutions already established in Svalbard. This includes a substantial capability for utilising remote sensing resources to complement ground-based observations. From this solid foundation, SIOS envisions a significant contribution to the systematic development of new methods and observational design in Svalbard. This knowledge can advance other observational networks in the Arctic and elsewhere.

SIOS is aiming at more efficient use and better integration of the observing system based on a distributed data management system, an open access program that includes logistical support, as well as training and education activities. Working groups, task forces and other SIOS components pursue these aims in direct and structured dialogue with scientists, user groups, policy-makers and other porters of societal and scientific needs.

SIOS brings observations together into a coherent and integrated observational programme that will be sustained. Thus, SIOS offers unique opportunities for research and the acquisition of fundamental knowledge about global environmental change.

SIOS focuses on processes and their interactions between the different spheres, i.e., biosphere, geosphere, atmosphere, cryosphere, and hydrosphere. The core observational programme of SIOS provides the research community with systematic observations that are sustained over time, yet dynamic enough to be adapted as new methods appear or society poses new questions.

SIOS entered the operational phase in January 2018, after a three-year long interim phase (November 2014 – January 2018) and a four year long preparatory phase (October 2010 – November 2014). Currently, the consortium consists of 26 institutions from 9 countries (Appendix 1). The goals, benefits, and duties of SIOS are summarised in appendix 2 and the main achievements to date are compiled in appendix 3. The following text gives a detailed description of the elements within SIOS.

Development and integration of the observation system

SIOS aims to set an example for how to systematically construct observational networks in the Arctic and how joint efforts provide added value to the user community. SIOS uses several means to achieve this goal. The working groups secure user commitment and impact on the process of improving the existing observing system; the data portal with its access to standardised data facilitates the integration between different research fields and nations; and the State of Environmental Science in Svalbard (SESS) report is an efficient tool for research-based guidance towards optimisation of the Svalbard Observing System for Earth System Science. The strategic overview, optimisation and integration of the observing system is handled at the science manager level. The final decisions are made by the General Assembly, after recommendations from the Board of Directors who in turn are guided by the Science Optimisation Advisory Group and other working groups (see figure 1).

State of Environmental Science in Svalbard (SESS) report

The main tangible product of SIOS is the annual State of Environmental Science in Svalbard (SESS) report.

The SESS report:

- is established as an authoritative source of information about the state of the environment in and around Svalbard;
- is an important tool to convey knowledge to stakeholders and the public;

- addresses the scientific community, as well as stakeholders and the public. This format ensures that there is synergy between the scientific investigations and the knowledge needed by society to sustainably develop and safeguard the Arctic environment;
- is the main driving force for the science-based development of the observing system and contributing to the report is an opportunity for research groups to actively influence the prioritisation within SIOS.

The report summarises the state of current knowledge of key Earth System Science parameters and analyses how these parameters influence one another. It combines the long-term monitoring data that form the core of the observing system with new, innovative monitoring and research. In addition to evaluating the state of current knowledge, the SESS report highlights questions that remain unanswered and recommends solutions in terms of research infrastructure improvements and research priorities.

It is an arena for open sharing of ideas and discussions on which measures should be taken to enable scientists to provide observations needed to gain a holistic view of the Earth System of Svalbard and the Arctic in general.

Contributions to the SESS report are written by international and, preferably, multidisciplinary teams under the lead of researchers from SIOS member institutions. All chapters are peer-reviewed and subject to final approval by an editorial board. The editorial board consist of two senior researchers, one early career researcher and two representatives of the SIOS Knowledge Centre.

The third SESS report has been published in January 2021.

The SIOS Knowledge Centre

The SIOS Knowledge Centre (SIOS-KC) is the central hub of SIOS. It is located in the Svalbard Science Centre in Longyearbyen and coordinates the services provided by the SIOS consortium for the international research community. The SIOS-KC is presently mainly funded by the Research Council of Norway. It has a staff of five, one associated staff from the Meteorological Institute of Norway (data manager) and is occasionally complemented by additional personnel (e.g., secondments and interns).

SIOS-KC has currently established five working groups and committees in order to support

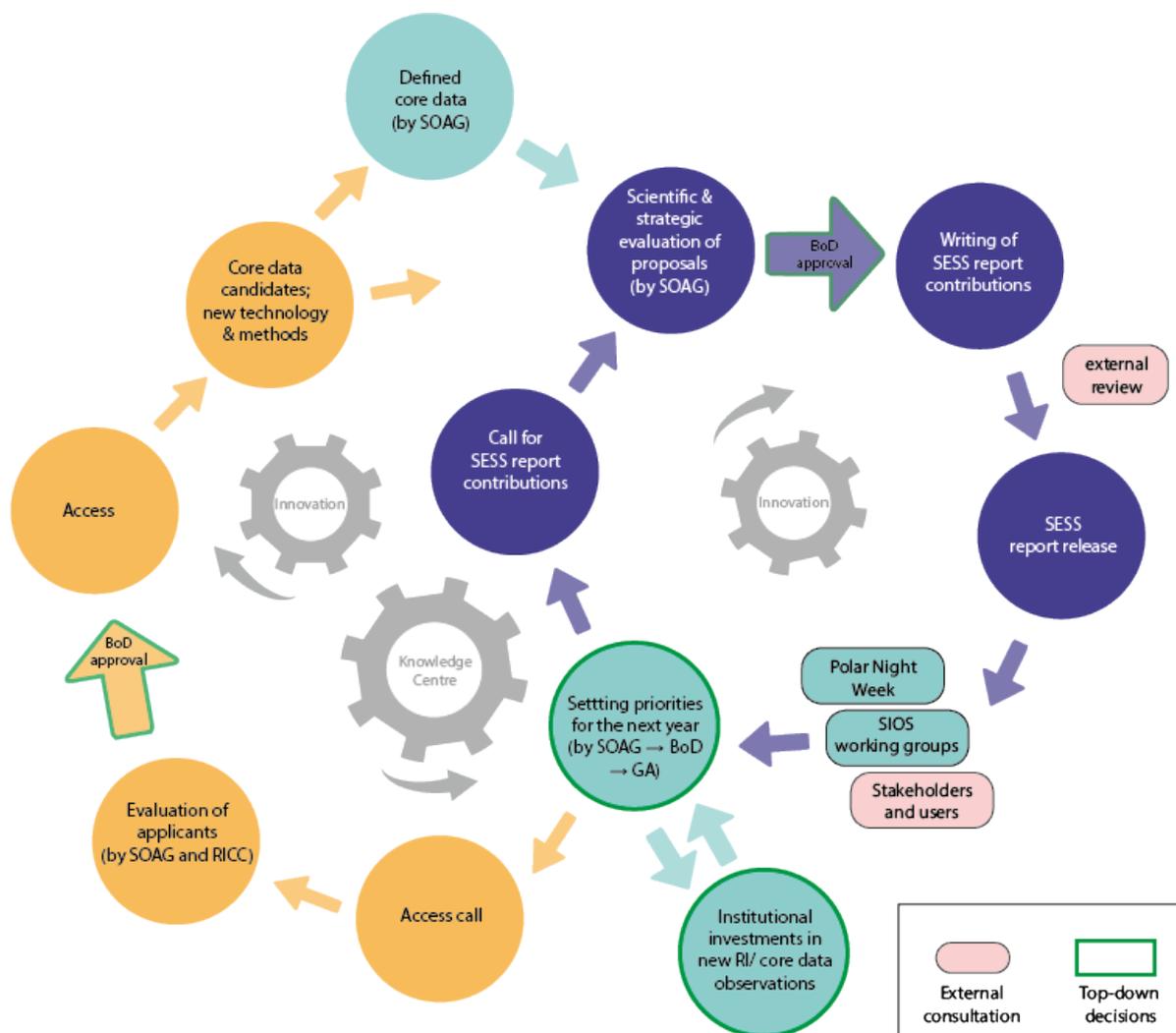


Figure 1: Concept of the SIOS science wheel to optimise the observing system, showing the development of the State of Environmental Science in Svalbard report (blue) and the Access Programme (yellow). Other elements within SIOS that influence the processes are shown in turquoise. The science wheel is driven mainly through bottom-up processes but is regularly aligned through top-down decisions. Innovation is central in both circles in order to improve the Observing System. The SIOS Knowledge Centre ensures the continuous development, the teeth of the cogwheel representing the coordinated services that drive SIOS and the observing system forward. SESS = State of Environmental Science in Svalbard report; GA = General Assembly; BoD = Board of Directors; SOAG = Science Optimisation Advisory Group; RICC = Research Infrastructure Coordination Committee; RI = Research Infrastructure.

the services offered to the SIOS community: The Science Optimisation Advisory Group (SOAG), the SIOS Data Management System Working group (SDMS WG), the Remote Sensing Working group (RSWG), the Research Infrastructure Coordination Committee (RICC), and the Information Advisory Group (IAG). These working groups and committees

consist of representatives of the member institutions and carry out tasks given by the General Assembly or the Board of Directors. They also suggest the work programme for the different services. In addition to the working groups, ad-hoc task forces are formed for shorter periods to tackle specific tasks delegated from the working groups and committees.

SIOS Science Optimisation Service

The science optimisation activities are central to SIOS. They develop the science case for SIOS and strive to advance the SIOS research infrastructure towards a solid base for comprehensive knowledge of the Earth System in Svalbard.

As one step towards optimising the common resources in answering the identified key research questions, the first set of SIOS core data has been defined. SIOS core data are based on the Essential Climate Variables¹ relevant to the Arctic and follow the criteria of scientific relevance, data availability and collecting commitment in the SIOS community.

Based on these core data, recommendations from the SESS report, and input from the SIOS community as well as other stakeholders, workshops and training courses are developed to further scientific collaboration and competence in ESS related issues.

The annual meeting, SIOS Polar Night Week, brings the SIOS community together for science seminars, meetings and the SESS report release. Monthly webinars on specific themes related to SIOS and ESS, including panel discussions keep the community informed and offer a platform for interdisciplinary discussions.

The joint prioritisations of the consortium enhance the ability to compete for funding. Three successful examples are the project 'SIOS – Infrastructure development of the Norwegian node (SIOS InfraNor)' – funded through the National Financing Initiative for Research Infrastructure by the Norwegian Research Council of Norway, and SIOS' participation in the projects 'ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES BUILDING FAIR SERVICES ACCESSIBLE FOR SOCIETY, INNOVATION AND RESEARCH (ENVRI-FAIR)' and 'Pan-Arctic observing System of Systems: Implementing Observations for societal Needs (Arctic PASSION)' – both funded by European Union's Horizon 2020.

Although SIOS focuses on the Svalbard region, it strongly works on the integration with other regional, pan-Arctic and European initiatives and plays an active role in several international

¹ <https://gcos.wmo.int/en/essential-climate-variables>

networks and projects (e.g., SAON/IASC, EU Polar Cluster, ENRIITC, AASCO, ENVRI community, WMO/WIGOS).

SIOS Data Management Service

The SIOS Data Management Service is integrating information from SIOS partner data repositories into a common virtual data centre, allowing SIOS users to search for and access data regardless of where they are archived. Providers and users have to commit to the SIOS data policy. The current focus is on discovery through standardised metadata, and retrieval, visualisation & transformation of data. Ultimately, the Data Management Service works towards integration of datasets which requires a high level of interoperability at the data level.

The SIOS Data Management System is also used by other initiatives, like the Norwegian project Nansen Legacy² and the international GCI-Cusp initiative³.

SIOS Remote Sensing Service

The SIOS Remote Sensing Service is designed to offer researchers a single-point of contact for satellite information for Svalbard while drawing on the combined knowledge of the network of SIOS partner institutions. The Remote Sensing Service coordinates commissioned data processing, communicates with the space agencies for promoting Svalbard as a potential cal/val site, advises researchers on their respective satellite needs, and provides tailored training on remote sensing. It facilitates and promotes the use of remote sensing products in the diverse parts of the SIOS science community.

SIOS contributes to the EU Copernicus programme by acting as the northernmost Copernicus Relay of the planet.

SIOS Research Infrastructure Access and Logistics Service

The SIOS Access Programme facilitates access to the distributed research infrastructure owned and operated by SIOS members and made available to SIOS. The programme is coordinated by SIOS-KC in collaboration with the Research Infrastructure Coordination Committee (RICC) and offers access to scientific facilities and research instruments through regular strategic SIOS calls. The access programme is supported by the logistics service,

² <https://arvenetternansen.com>

³ <https://www.grandchallenge.no>

which also coordinates logistical support for all researchers employed at SIOS member institutions. The offered services include storage, transport, guest office and links with commercial service providers.

SIOS Training Service

The SIOS Training Service aims to provide researchers with necessary skills to make the best use of the SIOS research infrastructure and observing system. Based on requests by the SIOS community and training needs identified by the working groups, SIOS currently offers two types of training courses:

- Training courses in data management to encourage and facilitate good data management right from the planning of a project. These courses are either held as separate courses for targeted audiences or can be applied for through an add-on module in the frame of the Svalbard Strategic Grant by Svalbard Science Forum.
- Training courses in remote sensing tailored towards specific fields. Previous courses have been focusing on cryosphere, marine, and terrestrial remote sensing. The planned course for 2021 will be on the processing of data from airborne hyperspectral remote sensing sensors.

SIOS Communication Service

The Communication Service is closely interconnected with the other SIOS services in order to best promote their activities. It provides information about SIOS-KC activities, the Observing System developments, and SIOS-related activities within the member institutions. It maintains the SIOS web portal www.sios-svalbard.org, communication on social media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn), and through newsletters. It supports scientific presentations by the SIOS-KC staff and produces information and outreach material for conferences, networking and other opportunities. In addition, the Communication Service engages with the general public through local public events as well as presenting ESS in a popular way through social media.

Governance and organisational structure

SIOS is a distributed research infrastructure organised as a consortium. The consortium consists of the member institutions and its cooperation is based upon non-legally binding statutes and a MoU. It coordinates, develops and optimises research infrastructure owned by the member institutions. Research institutions and research funding agencies that own or operate research facilities in the Svalbard region or who provide research data relevant for the consortium may become members. SIOS is funded by the Research Council of Norway, in-cash and in-kind contributions from the consortium members.

The General Assembly is the ultimate authority of SIOS, and consists of the consortium members. It is responsible for the overall direction and supervision of SIOS. The General Assembly appoints the Board of Directors and may establish advisory boards and committees.

The Chair of the Board of Directors is, by statute, an employee of a Norwegian member institution. The Board of Directors is responsible for the operation of SIOS in accordance with the directions and decisions given by the General Assembly.

The SIOS Director is appointed by the General Assembly on the proposal from the Board of Directors and carries out the day-to-day management of SIOS. The SIOS director is head of the SIOS Knowledge Centre and the SIOS administration. The SIOS director is also the director of the public limited company 'SIOS Svalbard AS', which was established 20 December 2016 to serve as the legal body of SIOS in its operational phase. The company is owned by the University Centre in Svalbard and is the vehicle for SIOS to enter into contracts necessary for running the consortium, e.g., employing staff for the Knowledge Centre.

On 26 January 2018, the start of the operational phase of SIOS was marked by 10 members of the interim phase signing the MoU accepting the SIOS statutes. Those are the founding members. In addition, two institutions became an observer. At the same time the General Assembly also accepted 13 new members. The statutes set out how the operational SIOS will function, and includes a preliminary budget for the first five years. This budget is based on contributions from the Norwegian host and from the consortium partners. The member contribution consists of two parts; an obligatory annual in-cash contribution of €10 000, and a contribution that may consist of in-kind or in-cash. The host contribution is guaranteed until end of 2021 and a 5-year extension has been applied for. The partner contributions go in full towards the activities decided by the General Assembly.

Further information

Consortium - <https://sios-svalbard.org/Consortium>

Management - <https://sios-svalbard.org/Management>

Observing System - <https://sios-svalbard.org/ObservingSystem>

Knowledge Centre - <https://sios-svalbard.org/KnowledgeCentre>

Working Groups - <https://sios-svalbard.org/WorkingGroups>

SESS report - <https://sios-svalbard.org/SESSreport>

Access programme - <https://sios-svalbard.org/RIAccess>

SIOS data access portal - https://sios-svalbard.org/metadata_search

Core data - <https://sios-svalbard.org/CoreData>

Polar Night Week - <https://www.sios-svalbard.org/PolarNightWeek>

Documents (e.g., statutes, data policy and access policy) - <https://sios-svalbard.org/Documents>

APPENDIX 1

Current SIOS member institutions

1. Akvaplan-NIVA, Norway
2. Alfred Wegener Institute, Germany, Founding Member
3. Andøya Space Center, Norway
4. Geological Survey of Norway, Norway
5. Institute for Atmospheric and Earth System Research of the University of Helsinki, Finland, Founding Member
6. Institute of Geophysics, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland, Founding Member
7. Institute of Marine Research, Norway
8. Nansen Environmental and Remote Sensing Center, Norway, Founding Member
9. National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, India
10. National Institute for Polar Research, Japan, Founding Member
11. National Research Council of Italy, Italy, Founding Member
12. NORCE - The Norwegian Research Centre, Norway
13. Norwegian Institute for Air Research, Norway
14. Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, Norway
15. Norwegian Institute for Water Research, Norway
16. Norwegian Meteorological Institute, Norway, Founding Member
17. Norwegian Polar Institute, Norway, Founding Member
18. Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate, Norway
19. NTNU – Norwegian University of Science and Technology
20. Swedish Polar Research Secretariat, Sweden, Founding Member
21. The University Centre in Svalbard, Norway, Founding Member
22. UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway
23. University of Bergen, Norway
24. University of Groningen, The Netherlands
25. University of Oslo, Norway
26. University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

APPENDIX 2

Goals of SIOS

- Enhance Svalbard as an Earth system science research platform
- Coordinate long-term monitoring
 - To enhance data availability
 - To increase the impact of the Svalbard monitoring in international processes
 - To enhance stakeholder influence on monitoring
 - To address grand challenges of Arctic environmental research
- Stimulate new research endeavours in Svalbard by providing a “core data” and infrastructure backdrop that is unprecedented in polar regions.
- Stimulate innovation in instruments, methods and measurement strategies to enhance monitoring in the Arctic (and as a spin-off probably elsewhere too).
- Work towards creating an environment where interactive experiment adjustment in the field will be made possible through real-time data services.
- Efficient use of infrastructure
- Stimulate inter-station cooperation and exchange in Svalbard
- Ensure transparency of research activities at all stations
- Enable an open access data policy in Svalbard with a database system

Benefits for SIOS members

- Prioritised access to SIOS infrastructure
- Prioritised services from SIOS
- Open access to data
- Increased cost efficiency and quality for monitoring and science
- Better overall usage of own research infrastructure
- Influence on the long-term development of monitoring and research infrastructure in Svalbard
- Influence what constitutes core data
- Influence the development of SIOS services
- Better coordination of funding applications improving chances of success
- Promotion of own institution and data through SESS report and SIOS outreach activities
- Right to use SIOS brand

Duties of members

- Commit to long-term monitoring efforts
- Participate in working groups, task forces, and SIOS governing bodies
- Support SIOS with cash and in-kind contributions as decided by the General Assembly
- Adhere to SIOS data and access policies
- Compulsory reporting to RiS⁴

Duties, rights, and opportunities for non-members

- Adhere to Svalbard research data policies
- Compulsory reporting to RiS
- Open access to data
- SIOS services are offered when there is available capacity at full cost recovery
- Access to infrastructure is open but at owners' discretion and at full cost recovery
- Provide input to SESS reports to empower own future membership/participation

⁴ Research in Svalbard (RiS) database (<https://www.researchinsvalbard.no>) containing information about research and monitoring projects in Svalbard and surrounding waters.

APPENDIX 3

Main achievements during the operational phase

- Three issues of the [State of Environmental Science in Svalbard \(SESS\)](#) report have been published since 2018 resulting in 30 new chapters and 4 updates with contributions from 18 nations covering a wide range of Earth system science topics.
- A first set of core data has been identified. It is based on the [Essential Climate Variables](#) relevant to the Arctic and contains currently almost 60 parameters.
- 15 projects were supported in the first two years of the [access programme](#) and applications increased threefold in 2019 resulting in 14 grants in 2020. 11 of these projects were postponed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, nine additional projects were granted access to SIOS facilities in 2021.
- The [Observation Facility Catalogue](#) provides an overview of facilities collecting SIOS data and the newly launched [Logistics Sharing Notice Board](#) enables SIOS members to cooperate and share field logistics.
- [Logistical services](#) offered to the SIOS community include services from SIOS-KC, member institutions and commercial providers.
- The research infrastructure investment project "SIOS – Infrastructure development of the Norwegian node ([SIOS-InfraNor](#))" funded by the Research Council of Norway (94.27 million NOK) and the Norwegian Space Agency (13 million NOK) started in 2018 and includes 41 items ranging from new instruments to remote sensing products. A follow-up application has been submitted to the Research Council of Norway in 2020.
- SIOS is a partner in two EU funded projects: 'ENVironmental Research Infrastructures building Fair services Accessible for society, Innovation and Research ([ENVRI-FAIR](#))' and 'Pan-Arctic observing System of Systems: Implementing Observations for societal Needs (Arctic PASSION)' (project start: 1 July 2021).
- SIOS contributes to and collaborates with several networks and initiatives, e.g., SAON/IASC, EU Polar Cluster, ENRIITC, AASCO, ENVRI community, WMO/WIGOS.
- Three [SIOS Polar Night Weeks](#), the annual meeting of the SIOS community, have been held with up to 70 - 100 participants every year.

- SIOS engages with the local community to public outreach events, e.g. a talk during the popular Svalbard Seminar organised every January in Longyearbyen, and a [‘expert night’](#) in a local pub.
- organised a well-received public event in local pub in Longyearbyen: “Ask an expert”. 7 experts from the SIOS community answered earlier collected and ad hoc questions from the audience on Earth System Science (See media coverage [here](#)).
- A [marine infrastructure network](#) has been established in 2020 to discuss science, harmonise data, optimise research infrastructure and share logistics related to marine biology and oceanography – as a response to recommendations from the SESS report.
- SIOS is full member of [Svalbard Science Forum](#) and Observer in the [Ny-Ålesund Science Managers Committee](#).
- SIOS actively mentors early career researchers (ECR) to promote SIOS activities in the younger generation. In all three years of the SESS report, SIOS engaged an ECR in the editorial board. In 2020, a ECR observer member was recruited into RSWG.
- A multidisciplinary [workshop on snow research](#) has been held online in February 2021 with more than 100 participants. The aim was to draft an [agenda paper for snow research in Svalbard](#), initiate discussions on snow technology between researchers and SMEs, and explore the potential of community-based snow observations in Svalbard. The final version of the agenda paper is due in April 2021.
- SIOS currently hosts the [special issue](#) “Earth Observation (EO), Remote Sensing (RS), and Geoinformation (GI) Applications in Svalbard” in the Remote Sensing (MDPI) journal. The submission period lasts from 1 March 2020 - 31 December 2021
- A [perspective paper](#) on the effects of travel restrictions caused by the pandemic situation and SIOS’s operational activities to respond to these was published in February 2021 in the peer-reviewed international MDPI Remote Sensing journal. The paper was written by 32 authors from 18 SIOS member institutions across 6 countries.
- SIOS-KC and RSWG launched the [SIOS webinar series ‘An anchor point to a drifting world’](#) in March 2020 as response to cancelled field campaigns and conferences due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, total 16 talks and 3 panel discussions were conducted during 4 webinars which were attended by around 200 international participants. Due to its success, the series will be continued also in the future.

- An [online conference](#) on Earth Observation (EO), Remote Sensing (RS), and Geoinformation (GI) applications in Svalbard was organized in June 2020 by SIOS-KC in cooperation with RSWG. A total of 53 talks were delivered, including 3 keynote talks and 3 invited talks, by presenters from 24 institutions from 12 countries. 370 participants registered for the conference.
- A new service '[patch up your field data with remote sensing observations](#)' was launched in March 2020 to mitigate damage occurred due to travel restrictions related to the pandemic in terms of data gaps. Up to now, 4 requests were received.
- Three training courses on remote sensing applications (cryosphere, marine, terrestrial) have been successfully conducted since 2018. A fourth course will be held in September 2021. Training courses and webinars on data management are offered for different knowledge levels.
- A call for project proposals for acquiring aerial imagery and hyperspectral data using SIOS airborne remote sensing platforms resulted in 25 h of flight time for 10 scientific research projects in 2020. A second call has been launched in January 2021 and received 15 applications (available funding: at least 1 million NOK).
- The [SIOS Data Access Portal](#) contains more than 1600 datasets. The data management service is working continuously to harvest more datasets from SIOS partner data depositories.