

CONFERENCE REJUVENATION: THE WAY FORWARD

Conferences represent one of the key pillars for ComSoc. So far our conferences have been quite successful and this is due to a large extent to the dedication of many volunteers who contribute a significant amount of their time to guarantee this success. Moving forward, it is critical for ComSoc to reevaluate the operation of our conferences and make sure that we stay ahead and continue to lead. Over the past year, we have focused on doing so by conducting a review of our conferences and identifying new initiatives to enhance our conference attendee's experiences, further improve our technical content, improve the financial health of our events, provide the highest quality with the minimal cost, and further increase the number of attendees in our events from industry, etc.

The President's Page this month is shared with Stefano Bregni, ComSoc's Vice President for Conferences for 2018–19, who will share with us the status of our conferences along with the ongoing activities and plans.

Stefano Bregni is with Politecnico di Milano, Italy. He graduated in Electronics Engineering in 1990. After nine years in industry, he joined Politecnico di Milano in 1999. He has contributed to ETSI/ITU-T standards and is an author of about one hundred papers and of a recognized book on network synchronization (Wiley, 2002). He was an IEEE ComSoc Distinguished Lecturer for seven years. As a volunteer in the IEEE Communications Society and before being elected Vice-President for Conferences (2018–19), he served as Vice-President for Member and Global Activities; Vice-President for Member Relations; Member at Large on the Board of Governors for two terms; Director of Education; Transmission, Access and Optical Systems TC Chair; and Member at Large on the GLOBECOM/ICC Technical Content (GITC) Committee. He has been Editor-in-Chief of the IEEE ComSoc *Global Communications Newsletter* since 2007.

He has many years of experience in the technical program management and organization of ComSoc conferences. Among his many appointments over the last 20 years, he was ICC 2016 Technical Program Co-Chair, GLOBECOM 2012 and GLOBECOM 2009 Technical Program Vice-Chair, LATINCOM 2011 Technical Program Co-Chair, and Symposium Co-Chair for nine other ICC/GLOBECOM Conferences. In 2014, he received the ComSoc Hal Sobol Award for Exemplary Service to Meetings & Conferences.

CONFERENCES: THE PILLAR OF COMSOC

Within ComSoc, conferences not only contribute to the generation of very high technical content, but also play a major role in sustaining ComSoc's overall activities through their financial returns. In fact, conferences yield more than half of the total revenues in the ComSoc budget. We also note that one of the main reasons why engineers decide to become ComSoc members and renew their membership, year after year, lies in the technical excellence and reputation of ComSoc Conferences and Publications. ComSoc Conferences, in particular, showcase the latest advances in communications



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and networking and, for all attendees, represent an extraordinary opportunity to meet and network with the best researchers and experts.

This is the second President's Page dedicated to ComSoc Conferences during the current term 2018-19. In the first page, published exactly one year ago in the issue dated February 2018, we presented the main areas of interest of the Conference Council, its organization, and the strategies and goals planned for the incoming term. In this Page, we are now able not only to present the status of the current activities, but also present the main achievements and ongoing plans after our first year of service.

THE CONFERENCES COUNCIL:
SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION

According to the Bylaws of the IEEE Communications Society, the Conferences Council (CON-C) is responsible for the needs of the Society and Society members related to technical conferences, workshops, and professional meetings.

Chaired by the Vice-President for Conferences, it includes as voting members:

- Hikmet Sari, France, Director of Conference Operations.
- Joel Rodrigues, Brazil, Director of Conference Development.
- Koichi Asatani, Japan, Chair of the GLOBECOM/ICC Management & Strategy (GIMS) Standing Committee.
- Matthew Valenti, USA, Chair of the GLOBECOM/ICC Technical Content (GITC) Standing Committee.
- Fambirai Takawira, South Africa, ComSoc Treasurer.
- Seven Members representing major ComSoc conferences and the Technical and Education

Activities Council.

As specified in the ComSoc Bylaws, the objectives of the Conferences Council are to:

- Manage the ComSoc Portfolio of Conferences (that is, those conferences that are financially sponsored or financially co-sponsored by ComSoc).
- Manage the process of ComSoc Technical Co-Sponsorship (TCS) for non-ComSoc conferences.
- Develop policies regarding the financial, publications, and operational aspects of ComSoc's portfolio conferences.
- Oversee ComSoc's flagship conferences (IEEE ICC and IEEE GLOBECOM).

Such objectives are pursued by the two Conference Boards and Standing Committees, which report to the Conferences Council, as follows.

The *Conferences Development Board* is responsible for the strategic planning, technical scope, and growth of all ComSoc conferences.

The *Conferences Operations Board* is responsible for the oversight and management of the operational, publications, and financial aspects of all ComSoc conferences.

The *GIMS (GLOBECOM/ICC Management and Strategy) Standing Committee* is responsible for the successful organization of the IEEE GLOBECOM and IEEE ICC conference series.

The *GITC (GLOBECOM/ICC Technical Content) Standing Committee* is responsible for the technical content of the IEEE GLOBECOM and IEEE ICC conference series.

REVISED PORTFOLIO OF COMSOC CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

Since 2011, IEEE ComSoc has adopted a Management Strategy for its financially sponsored technical conferences and workshops, based on the definition of a Portfolio of technical events. ComSoc Portfolio Conferences (or more broadly speaking, technical events) are defined as all those events that are financially sponsored, fully or in part, by ComSoc. Such a Management Strategy was defined by the Conference officers in charge in 2010-2011, namely, Khaled B. Letaief (Vice-President for Conferences), Merrily Hartmann (Director for Conference Operations) and Heinrich Stüttgen (Director for Conference Development), greatly supported in that effort by Bruce Worthman (ComSoc Staff, Director Conferences).

At the beginning of 2018, we started a process of consolidation and analysis of the ComSoc Conference Portfolio. After revision, ComSoc Portfolio Conferences are now classified in the following six categories.

- *Flagship Conferences* are those with a large international attendance (thousands or even several thousands of people), extensive coverage of the ComSoc technical scope, and involvement of nearly all ComSoc Technical Committees (TCs). Currently, the ComSoc Flagship Conferences are:

- IEEE Global Communications Conference (GLOBECOM).
- IEEE International Conference on Communications (ICC).

Twice a year, the above two conferences gather the broadest representation of ComSoc communities and host all the main ComSoc Boards and Committee meetings, including the ComSoc Board of Governors.

- *Core Conferences* are smaller, yet with a significant international attendance and narrower scope centred on a specific subset of the ComSoc technical areas. Current ComSoc Core Conferences are:

- IEEE Consumer Communications & Networking Conference (CCNC).
- IEEE Conference on Communications and Network Security (CNS).
- IEEE International Symposium on Dynamic Spectrum Access Networks (DySPAN).
- IEEE International Conference on e-Health Networking, Applications and Services (HEALTHCOM).
- IEEE International Conference on Blockchain and Cryptocurrency (ICBC).
- IEEE International Conference on Computer Communications (INFOCOM).
- IEEE International Conference on Communications, Control, and Computing Technologies for Smart Grids (SmartGridComm).
- IEEE Wireless Communications and Networking Conference (WCNC).
- IEEE/IFIP Network Operations and Management Symposium (NOMS) and IFIP/IEEE International Symposium on Integrated Network Management (IM).

- *Small Conferences and Workshops* are typically driven by a single Technical Committee. They have normally less than 100 attendees and are focused on a specific narrow technical scope. "Small" does not mean less significant within the conference technical area! Such ComSoc conferences and workshops have quite a good reputation in their respective field and meet all ComSoc quality requirements. This category currently includes about a dozen conferences.

- *Regional Conferences* are those that always occur in a specific ComSoc Region, drawing involvement from the local IEEE

Sections, ComSoc Chapters, and Sister Societies. Their main objective is to reach out to all countries while paying extra attention to disadvantaged areas, and ultimately to drive membership development. The group of ComSoc Regional Conferences currently enlists:

- IEEE Latin American Conference on Communications (LATINCOM) in Latin America.
- IEEE International Black Sea Conference on Communications and Networking (BLACKSEACOM) in the countries surrounding the Black Sea in Eastern Europe.
- IEEE/CIC International Conference on Communications in China (ICCC) throughout the greater China region.
- IEEE International Conference on Advanced Networks and Telecommunications Systems (ANTS) in India.
 - *Conferences Financially Co-Sponsored with other Societies*, namely:
 - IEEE Optical Networking and Communication Conference (OFC).
 - IEEE Military Communications Conference (MILCOM).
 - IEEE International Conference on Advanced Technologies for Communications (ATC).
 - European Conference on Networks and Communications (EuCNC).
 - IEEE International Conference on Multimedia and Expo (ICME).
 - IEEE Symposium on Computers and Communications (ISCC).
 - IEEE Conference on Network Softwarization (NetSoft).
 - IEEE International Symposium on Personal, Indoor and Mobile Radio Communications (PIMRC).
 - IEEE Vehicular Networking Conference (VNC).

- *Industry Summits and Forums* represent the most heterogeneous category in the Portfolio, grouping all those events aimed at industry and professionals, often based on invited contributions without following our traditional model of conference (e.g., peer review). This category currently enlists Brooklyn 5G Summit, Fog World Congress, IEEE 5G Summit, IEEE Greening through ICT (GtICT) Summit, IEEE IoT Summit, and IEEE WF-IOT.

The full list of ComSoc Portfolio Conferences and Workshops is posted on the ComSoc web site (<https://www.comsoc.org/conferences-events/portfolio-conferences-events>).

CONFERENCE PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS

In 2018, we started an ambitious plan for the systematic analysis of all conferences included in the ComSoc Portfolio. This is still an ongoing project and has been organized along two main axes.

- *Steering Committees and Charters*. This task, managed by Joel Rodrigues, Director of Conference Development, includes the review of the Steering Committees and Charters of Portfolio Conferences, aiming at identifying any peculiar situation worth closer attention, such as the expiration terms of Steering Committee Chairs or differences in Charters vs. the standard rules established in ComSoc.

- *Financial and Technical Performance*. This task, managed by Hikmet Sari, Director of Conference Operations, is focused on collecting and analyzing a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for all Portfolio Conferences, except for the Industry Summits and Forums, over the last five years (2014-2018). The selected KPIs are the following:

- Attendance indicators: paid registrations, complimentary registrations, and total registrations.
- Financial indicators: revenues, expenses, and surplus.
- Technical indicators: number of submitted papers, number of accepted papers, and acceptance ratio.

The analysis of the collected data has provided some significant insight into the operation and performance of our conferences, which is essential for future planning and strategies. For example, a stable good financial performance (surplus mostly

above 25 percent) and good selectivity (paper acceptance ratio firmly below 40 percent) of our flagship conferences ICC and GLOBECOM have been confirmed throughout the period under study. Moreover, INFOCOM is confirmed the most selective conference in the ComSoc Portfolio, with a paper acceptance ratio in the range of 15 percent to 21 percent, which is more commonly seen in high-quality Journals rather than conferences.

In spite of these positive data, some problems have been identified, such as relatively high paper acceptance ratios. Follow-up actions are now underway to address the identified problems.

COMSOC TECHNICAL CO-SPONSORSHIP

Technical Co-Sponsorship (TCS) by ComSoc is available to those technical events, in which ComSoc is not financially involved. However, TCS is only available to conferences that are financially sponsored by non-profit entities and have their scope within the ComSoc field of interest.

Granting ComSoc TCS is an indication of the technical quality of a conference, as overseen by ComSoc. It is considered a mark of quality by ComSoc members because it ensures that such conferences meet our minimum expectations for peer-reviewed events/meetings.

A detailed specification of the process for reviewing applications and granting or denying TCS has been developed by ComSoc Conference Directors, other volunteers and staff since 2012, particularly by Joe Touch (2012-2013) and Tarek El-Bawab (2014-2015). Since then, the TCS process specification has been included in the ComSoc Policies and Procedures (P&Ps) and posted on the ComSoc web site (<https://www.comsoc.org/conferences-events/event-sponsorship>).

Currently, the TCS Process is managed by Joel Rodrigues, Director of Conference Development, with the support of Portia King, ComSoc Staff. In addition to what is mandated by our P&Ps and to guarantee even more transparency and fairness to the process, during the current term 2018-19 TCS granting decisions are taken jointly by the two Directors for Conferences, Joel Rodrigues and Hikmet Sari.

Stringent requirements about the conference technical management are strictly required in order to grant TCS. Among them, the conference must be endorsed by at least one ComSoc TC, which nominates at least three members to have a direct and substantial involvement in the organization and development of the technical program. Moreover, the paper acceptance ratio should not be higher than 50 percent of the total number of submissions. TCS qualifies the Conference Proceedings to be considered for inclusion into IEEE Xplore®, but does not guarantee it.

Overall, the TCS Process implies a significant workload for Directors and Staff involved at different stages of the procedure. During 2018, for instance, 68 TCS applications were submitted, 54 approved, and eight declined. This sustained flow of one or two conference applications every week requires continuous attention by Joel and Portia, including communication with the organizing committees, solicitation of any missing information, and finally the examination of the submitted applications.

REGIONAL CONFERENCES: COMSOC IS TRULY GLOBAL!

One of our main goals is to favor participation of members from all regions, striving to reach out to all countries while paying extra attention to disadvantaged areas. ComSoc Regional Conferences are instrumental to bring this strategy into fruition. They may be the only opportunity for members in disadvantaged areas to attend first-rate international events. Certainly, the priority must be to ensure that Regional Conferences meet the same quality requirements of global Portfolio conferences. We

want to bring good conferences near to our members in any continent, to enable participation of our global network of ComSoc engineers and provide equal opportunities for those who do not have the chance to travel overseas.

Among ComSoc's Portfolio Regional Conferences, we wish to mention in particular the IEEE Latin-American Conference on Communications (IEEE LATINCOM), which in 10 years has consolidated itself as the reference conference on communications in Latin America. With its acceptance ratio firmly below 50 percent, exactly the same review process specified by GITC for our flagship conferences ICC and GLOBECOM, and an international TPC nominated by nearly all ComSoc TCs, IEEE LATINCOM does exceed the strict quality requirements set for the ComSoc TCS. Two years ago, a formal process for bidding and site selection was established by its Steering Committee to further improve transparency and the site selection process. The 10th edition of IEEE LATINCOM was held successfully in Guadalajara, Mexico in November 2018, featuring a high-quality technical program and well known keynote speakers.

IEEE BLACKSEACOM (IEEE International Black-Sea Conference on Communications and Networking) has been growing as a ComSoc Regional Conference, held annually in countries surrounding the Black Sea in Eastern Europe.

IEEE ANTS (IEEE International Conference on Advanced Networks and Telecommunications Systems) is the only conference in India that is financially sponsored by ComSoc.

Finally, IEEE/CIC ICC (IEEE/CIC International Conference on Communications in China) is held annually throughout the Greater China region. This conference has been very successful so far and is promising to grow even further.

GIMS AND GITC COMMITTEES: STEERING THE COMSOC FLAGSHIP CONFERENCES ICC AND GLOBECOM

More than a dozen years ago, the IEEE GLOBECOM-ICC Committee (GICC) was restructured into two specialized Steering Committees, namely, the IEEE GLOBECOM/ICC Technical Content (GITC) Committee and IEEE GLOBECOM/ICC Management and Strategy (GIMS) Committee, to address the technical and management aspects of ComSoc flagship conferences, respectively. The first two Chairs of the new GITC and GIMS Committees were Heiner Stüttgen and Mike Kincaid, respectively.

The GIMS Committee, currently chaired by Koichi Asatani, is responsible for the continuity, successful conduct, strategic evolution, and policy recommendations of the IEEE GLOBECOM and IEEE ICC conference series. In particular, for each ICC/GLOBECOM conference the GIMS Committee is responsible for:

- Selecting the location, venue and dates, evaluating bids to host a conference (at least four years before the date of the conference).
- Approving the appointment of the General Chair and Executive Chair/Vice Chair.
- Approving the venues and facilities (i.e., hotels, convention center, etc.).
- Approving the financial plans and providing advice on the preparation of their budgets.

The GITC Committee, currently chaired by Matthew Valenti, is responsible for steering the technical content of the IEEE GLOBECOM and IEEE ICC conference series, in order to ensure that the conference programs meet the high quality requirements expected by ComSoc members. In particular, for each ICC/GLOBECOM conference the GITC Committee is responsible for:

- Approving the appointment of a Technical Program Chair and Technical Program Vice-Chairs.

- Approving the technical program upon recommendation of the respective Technical Program Chair.
- Providing appropriate guidance to the Technical Program Chair and Technical Committees.

Moreover, for the ICC/GLOBECOM conference series, the GITC Committee is responsible for:

- Providing strategic directions for the evolution of the technical content of ICC/GLOBECOM.
- Regulating the ICC/GLOBECOM technical policies (e.g., the peer-review process).

Most attendees and authors of ICC and GLOBECOM simply enjoy their stable high-quality conference program year after year. What many people ignore, however, is that achieving this is not trivial and requires the joint effort of tens of volunteers in GITC and GIMS, not to mention the contribution of Conference Directors and Vice-Presidents along with the conference organizers. Clearly, no activity is exempt from problems. Therefore, we encourage ComSoc members to alert us if they have any comments or suggestions on how to improve our conferences and events.

STUDENTS MEET THE LEADERS AT ICC AND GLOBECOM

Thanks to an initiative of Khaled Letaief and with the enthusiastic support of Stefano Bregni, a special event “Network with the Leaders” was organized for the first time for our students at ICC 2018 and then at GLOBECOM 2018.

The aim of these events is to offer students an exclusive opportunity to meet ComSoc leaders (e.g., President and Vice-Presidents) and other community leaders (e.g., Keynote Speakers, Industry Leaders, etc.) in a relaxed and friendly setting, thus creating the opportunity for informal conversations between students and VIPs. Only ComSoc Student Members registered for the conference are invited to attend!

WOMEN IN COMMUNICATIONS ENGINEERING AND YOUNG PROFESSIONALS WORKSHOPS

Two very active ComSoc Standing Committees are the Women in Communications Engineering (WICE) Committee, chaired by Ana García Armada, Spain, and the Young Professionals (YP) Committee, chaired by Nury Gabriela Ramirez Cely, Mexico.

Every year, ComSoc Conferences offer ideal venues for events organized by the WICE and YP Committees such as workshops, summits, panels, and special sessions. Organizing WICE and YP events at major ComSoc conferences provides the chance for women and young professionals to network

with peers and exchange experiences. Such meetings also serve to promote the visibility of women and young professionals in Communications Engineering and create venues for mentoring and professional growth.

This year, the WICE Committee organized a professional development workshop at IEEE ICC 2018, Kansas City, USA, and another workshop entitled “Paving Your Way Into Engineering” at IEEE GLOBECOM 2018. Likewise, at IEEE ICC 2018, the YP Committee organized a “Meet and Greet” event joined by about 50 postgraduate students.

MOVING FORWARD AND PRIORITIES

As stated at the beginning, conferences represent one of the main pillars for ComSoc. Maintaining the high-quality of our events, while providing the conference attendees access to the latest advances in our field at a reasonable cost, is therefore of utmost importance. The key questions are why would one choose to attend our conferences instead of others, and how can we continue to attract the interest of our conference attendees.

We believe that the answers to the above questions are straightforward. In fact, attendees are attracted by the technical excellence and reputation of our Conferences and the opportunity to network with highly influential leaders and game-changers in our field. Consequently, in order to maintain our leadership and sustain the growth of our events, as well as to ensure that ComSoc fulfills its mission to serve its Members, our strategic priorities for conferences include the following:

- Guarantee and further enhance the technical excellence of ComSoc Conferences.
- Provide attractive content for all segments of our membership (including Academia, Industry, Students, Young and Senior Members), while putting greater emphasis on delivering technical content and products that are of the highest quality at affordable prices.
- Target new and emerging technologies.
- Strengthen ComSoc globalization activities and further open the door to recruiting young and talented volunteers as conference organizers.
- Increase our conference attendance by improving participant's experience and providing more opportunities to network with technical experts and leaders.

The above represent some of our key priorities. We are very excited by all the ongoing activities and we are very committed to bringing these into fruition as we move forward for a strong and healthy ComSoc in this rapidly changing world.