Managing ICC and GLOBECOM Flagship Conferences of ComSoc
Interview with Luis M. Correia, Chair of the GLOBECOM/ICC Management & Strategy (GIMS) Standing Committee

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ICC and GLOBECOM are the two flagship conferences of the IEEE Communications Society. They showcase ComSoc, have large international attendance up to thousands of people, extensive coverage of the whole ComSoc technical scope and involvement of nearly all ComSoc Technical Committees (TCs). Twice a year, these two conferences gather the broadest representation of ComSoc communities.

Stefano Bregni

Luis M. Correia

In this issue, I interview Luis M. Correia (IST/INESC-ID — University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal), Chair of the GLOBECOM/ICC Management & Strategy (GIMS) Standing Committee. With this interview, we present some details about the organization of ICC and GLOBECOM, addressing not only the formal aspects but also the matters behind the scenes.

Luis M. Correia is a Professor at IST-U. Lisbon, with his work focused on Wireless Communications. He has participated in 33 projects within European frameworks, having coordinated 6 and taken leadership at various levels in others. He has supervised over 230 M.Sc./Ph.D. students, having edited 6 books, and authored over 550 papers in international and national journals and conferences, for which served also as reviewer, editor and board member. Internationally, he was part of 40 Ph.D. juries, and 80 research projects and institutions evaluation committees for funding agencies in 12 countries, and the European Commission and COST. He has been the Chairman of Conferences, of Technical Program Committees and of Steering Committees for 25 major conferences. He was the founding Chairman of the ComSoc Portugal Chapter, and served in other bodies (Conferences Council, Industry Outreach Board, GLOBECOM/ICC Management & Strategy Standing Committee (GIMS), and Technological Evolution and Initiatives Standing Committee).

Stefano: Hello Luis! How could we introduce ICC and GLOBECOM to someone who has never attended them?

Luis: ICC (International Conference on Communications) and GLOBECOM (Global Communications Conference) are the flagship conferences of ComSoc, serving as an opportunity for our overall ComSoc community to gather every 6 months.

Since this series of conferences started, almost 60 years ago, they have evolved from small workshops to the largest conferences in their area, currently attracting around 2,500 colleagues from all around the world with every edition.

I am happy that ComSoc decided to start a regular column in Communications Magazine, reporting the highlights of each edition of these conferences after they occur, enabling to share with our community not only the most important aspects of the conference, but also fostering the conditions to all colleagues to be more familiar with the organization of these conferences and with their key aspects.

Stefano: ICC and GLOBECOM have two Steering Committees, one about technical aspects (GITC) and the other about organization, management and strategy (GIMS). Would you please tell us more?

Luis: Currently, I'm serving as the Chair of GIMS (GLOBECOM/ICC Management & Strategy Standing Committee), which supervises the general management aspects of the organization of these conferences, while the technical aspects are supervised by the GLOBECOM/ICC Technical Content Standing Committee – GITC).

GIMS is responsible for the successful conduct, strategic evolution and policies of GLOBECOM and ICC, providing strategic guidance, operational preparation and management oversight, reporting to the Conferences Council. In particular, GIMS is responsible for a number of activities regarding each edition of the conference, including:

- Selecting the location, venue and dates, by evaluating bids to host the conference;
- Initiating and approving an MoU with the Organizing Committee, addressing basic guidelines and directives for successfully managing the conference;
- Appointing or approving the appointment of a General Chair, Executive Chair/Vice Chair, Finance Chair, etc.;
- Approving locations and venues, i.e., hotel, convention center, etc.;
- Providing general consultation and appropriate guidance to the Organizing Committee, namely by appointing one member to serve as Adviser;
- Spproving financial plans, providing advice on the preparation of budgets and guidance with respect to all patronage related activities;
- Approving and aiding in the selection of themes.

Stefano: How GIMS is organized? What is its composition?

Luis: GIMS is composed of Voting and Non-Voting Members. Voting Members are the Chair, the GITC Chair, three Past Members of an ICC or GLOBECOM Organizing Committee and three Members-at-Large. Non-voting members are (ex-officio) the Vice-President Conferences and ComSoc Staff associated with the organization of these conferences.

The GIMS Chair appoints, among Voting Members, a Vice-Chair, as well as Working Group Chairs in charge of Operations, Site Selection, Industry Forums & Exhibitions, Finance, Patronage and Decision Matrix.

Voting Members serve staggered terms, the term of office being 3 years; in order to be eligible, Past Members must have served in an Organizing Committee for a conference held during the past 5 years at the time of the appointment.

Stefano: Do you meet often? Only in person or also via teleconferences? What are the most important topics for discussion and deliberation?

Luis: GIMS holds monthly meetings via videoconference, and two in-person ones at ICC and GLOBECOM.

Meetings that are held prior to each ICC and GLOBECOM are used to review the reports from Organizing Committees on the development of the organization of conferences, and also to approve the location of a conference, 48 months before it occurs.

You can get all details about GIMS at its website (https://gims.committees.comsoc.org).

Stefano: So, how is it about organizing ICC and GLOBECOM? They are large events, so, many people are involved.

Luis: Well, you must start preparing yourself almost 5 years in advance. ICC and GLOBECOM are held annually, roughly 6 months apart from each other (ICC in late May or early June and GLOBECOM in late November or early December), rotating among the three world regions: Americas, EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) and Asia/Pacific. For example, at ICC 2023 Rome, we had the initial presentation of proposals concerning the organization of GLOBECOM 2027, which is scheduled to be held in the EMEA region, so you can see how early everything needs to start.

ICC and GLOBECOM are very large conferences, requiring a large plenary room and a high number of breakout rooms for all parallel sessions and meetings, which means that it's not easy to find a venue that can accommodate them. This also means that advanced booking is a must, if we want to guarantee that a suitable location and venue is offered to attendees.

As many of our colleagues may have already experienced, sometimes it's not possible to have a unique venue to accommodate the whole conference and splitting it between two locations has to be the only solution, but this is avoided as much as possible, due to the obvious inconvenience that it represents to attendees.

Stefano: In your opinion, what is the most delicate aspect to cope with?

Luis: Certainly, choosing a good location and suitable venue is the key, but there's another very important factor, i.e., the Organizing Committee. One can say that "ICC and GLOBECOM are too big to fail," but this comes only because of the hard work by many Volunteers and Staff.

ICC and GLOBECOM are the key conferences of ComSoc, so their organization cannot be done with an approach of starting from scratch in every edition. This means that an Organizing Committee must have a good blend of colleagues experienced in organizing conferences (namely, previous editions of ICC and GLOBECOM) together with colleagues that may not have that experience, but bring new ideas and perspectives; the former are essential and the latter are desirable.

After GIMS selects the winning proposal for a given edition, a long relationship among the Organizing Committee, GIMS and ComSoc staff starts, which will last for (at least) around 5 years, i.e., up to some months after the conference. Every 6 months, at ICC and GLOBECOM, the Organizing Committee has to report to GIMS and GITC on the progress of the organization of the conference, following a pre-established planning (the Decision Matrix). The items in this Decision Matrix range from venue contracts to the full definition of the Organizing Committee, and encompassing other matters such as budget, program structure and schedule, keynotes and executive fora, and patronage, among many others.

Stefano: The role of GIMS and GITC here is fundamental. Correct?

Luis: Definitely! GIMS and GITC have the simultaneous role of approving and advising, so Organizing Committees not only report and seek approval for some items, but also get support on many others.

There's a whole body of knowledge accumulated from previous editions that is made available to Organizing Committees, via guidelines, templates, handbook and so on; and ComSoc staff acts also as the "gatekeeper," i.e., although GIMS Members are replaced after the ending of their terms, ComSoc staff has the accumulated experience of organizing many conferences (acting as a Professional Conference Organizer) and passes this experience onto Organizing Committees, taking care of many logistic aspects (e.g., registration, food and beverage, and budget, among many others).

Stefano: What are key items in a good organization of ICC and GLOBECOM, to make attendees satisfied after their experience?

Luis: There are some "sensitive" matters that need to be looked after, in order to provide conference attendees a good (at least, if not excellent) service and experience in being at the conference, in all its dimensions. These include the welcome reception and the banquet from the logistics side, and the keynotes and executive fora from the program one, just to name a few.

So, GIMS (with GITC) needs to have information on these matters in advance, so that adequate decisions are taken (accounting for budget implications as well). Usually, outside North America, a company (Professional Conference Organizer) is hired to provide services on logistic matters, so interaction with this company is very important, since Organizing Committees are not expected to have expertise on logistic matters. Small details can make a difference in our experience as attendees of a conference, and the perception we get on how well we feel at the end, e.g., waiting time to get a coffee at a break, quality of the food and entertainment at the banquet, and depth and communication capacity of keynotes.

Stefano: You are a conference attendee, organizer, and even the Chair of the committee that oversees the general organization of the series of conferences. From your multiple standpoint, why people attends our conferences? In particular ICC and GLOBECOM?

Luis: As an author, it's prestigious to have a paper at these conferences, given the quality requirements put in place (by GITC). Basically, these conferences have one of the lowest acceptance ratios in our area, which means that really only high quality papers pass the "review filter."

But, besides that, they serve also as a means to network with colleagues in the same area of research, enabling exchange of ideas, discussion of possible projects, and exploration of collaborations and joint work, besides the sheer joy of meeting colleagues and talking to them. Networking, in the best meaning of the word, is a key component of the research activity, and one of the best ways to exercise it is definitely by attending conferences such as ICC and GLOBECOM.

Stefano: Luis, please give us a hint of what is being cooked in background. What is GIMS working on lately? What news are awaiting attendees ahead?

Luis: The program of ICC and GLOBECOM is currently being restructured, meaning that, besides the usual sessions that are usually part of the program, new ones are being added, aiming at other goals, e.g., bringing more industry discussions and expertise, creating ways to link Ph.D. students that are about to graduate and postdocs with companies that may potentially hire them, enabling more business perspectives by having the participation of startup companies, and mixing more the world of academia and industry.

Stay tuned for the next editions of the conferences.