

## Latin America Region Interview with Pedro Aguilera, Director of the Latin America Region

By Stefano Bregni, Vice-President for Member Relations,  
and Pedro Aguilera, Director of the Latin America Region

This is the fifth article in the series of eight, begun in September and published monthly in the *Global Communications Newsletter*, which covers all areas of IEEE ComSoc Member Relations. In this series of articles I introduce the seven Member Relations Directors (Sister and Related Societies; Membership Programs Development; AP, NA, LA, EAME Regions; Marketing and Industry Relations) and the Chair of the Women in Communications Engineering (WICE) Standing Committee. In each article they present their activities and plans.

In this issue I interview Pedro Aguilera, Director of the Latin America Region. Pedro is an Electrical Engineer, graduated from the University of Chile. He is an IEEE Senior Member and has been an active volunteer for ComSoc and IEEE since 2003. Last year he was the

General Chair of the IEEE Latin American Conference on Communication (LATINCOM 2013). Currently he is a member of the IEEE Chile Section Board, Chair of the ComSoc Chile Chapter, and Director of the ComSoc Latin America Region. He has worked for 17 years on network planning and technology development at Telefónica Chile. Presently he is Account Manager at Switch Comunicaciones, Chile.

It is my pleasure to interview Pedro and to have this opportunity to present the organization and activities of the Latin America Region, which I have visited dozens of times, beginning in 2003 as an IEEE Distinguished Lecturer.

**Stefano:** Hola Pedro! Como estás? You have been Director of the Latin America Region for three years already. What are the biggest challenges and best opportunities in your Region?

**Pedro:** Hola Stefano! Yes, it is true. How quickly have these three years passed! About your question: I think we can do great things in this region. We have a lot of potential, but we need to achieve a higher level of participation and integration between ourselves. We have to take advantage of the many things we have in common: our cultural roots, our language, etc. Therefore, some of my personal objectives as Director of the LA Region are to achieve greater use of telecommunication technologies; increase the use of the DL/DS Programs; improve and extend the contributions to the GCN; improve the transition process from the Regional Director whose term is expiring to the new incoming Director; making the LA Board more efficient by having more meetings and by extending its composition.

**Stefano:** How would you extend the use of telecommunication technologies in the ComSoc activities of the LA Region?

**Pedro:** I deeply believe that ComSoc should be a model for the rest of the IEEE in this matter. Webinars, for example, are of great benefit for the members of ComSoc of Latin America who live in remote areas of the big cities. It is a good way to share the numerous technical activities in the region carrying out each chapter. Just imagine if we were able to transmit online and record each technical conference, we could construct a valuable database for our current members and attract new ones.

There has been some progress in this area already. Each year two or three webinars are realized in LA. Some of them are combined with the Distinguished Lecturer Tours program. Last year we also incorporated technical conferences in Spanish and Portuguese, the two predominant languages in the region. I encourage the use of webinars for all Latin American chapters. Today we have Webex accounts available at no cost for all chapters of ComSoc. It is easy to use and the technical requirements are minimal.

**Stefano:** You mentioned the Distinguished Lecturer/Speaker Programs. Over my 10 DLTs in the past, six were in Latin America. So I am very much interested to know more about what are your objectives and achievements in this area.

**Pedro:** The Distinguished Lecturer Tour (DLT) and the Distinguished Speaker Program (DSP) are much appreciated sources of activity for members of ComSoc. However, Latin

America has some particular challenges that it must be addressed. This year we tried to organize seven DLTs, but only four were finally completed. ComSoc's Distinguished Lecturers are distributed mainly in North America, Europe, and Asia. The geography of Latin America makes it very difficult to get DLs from Europe and Asia. The high cost of the airfare and the long hours of travel are difficult barriers to overcome. In this sense, in 2014 we made valuable progress on flexibility for the limits of funds for international tickets associated with Distinguished Lecturer Tours. This is very positive and we thank the MPD Director, Dr. Koichi Asatani, and of course you, Stefano, for the strong support, without which we would not have achieved this flexibility.

**Stefano:** Thanks a lot. It is always good to hear when someone appreciates our work. It is true indeed that I always presented the Distinguished Lecturer Program as one of the most important programs of ComSoc, because it is an effective way to serve members, especially in disadvantaged areas. Another element that I believe is central in ComSoc's Member Relations strategies is the *Global Communications Newsletter*. I am working to improve its contents and distribution. Indeed, I want it to be considered the "Voice of the Chapters." Would you tell us something about your plans about GCN in the LA Region?

**Pedro:** I must admit that our region contributes very little to this excellent newsletter. The number of articles sent does not reflect the level of activity that we carry on in the Region. In conjunction with our GCN Regional Correspondent, Lisandro Zambenedetti, we have been implementing some steps to improve

this situation. One of them was to contact the organizers of technical activities, searching in the official IEEE L31 Report database, and ask them for articles. This was recently implemented a few months ago and we expect to evaluate results next year. We are also managing to have access to the reports that Distinguished Lecturers provide after tours when visiting our region. No doubt that this issue has been the most difficult to address by me.

**Stefano:** I am confident you will be successful to improve the situation. You also mentioned that you wish to improve the transition process from the Regional Director, whose term is expiring, to the incoming Director.

**Pedro:** This is a new aspect that I am raising as a problem for our Region. Indeed, the ComSoc policy establishes that RDs are appointed by the President of Comsoc, for two-year terms. In my case, when I assumed this position everything was completely new for me. Despite the fact that I had been a member of the ComSoc Latin America Regional Board (LAB) for six years as, in the region we never had a meeting of the Board. I knew little or nothing about the guidelines and plans of the previous directors. In practical terms, I had to start from scratch.

An interesting discussion has been started with you, Koichi

Asatani, and the other regional directors on this subject. This has been very helpful. I have discovered that this problem is not exclusive to Latin America. We have taken some good ideas from the excellent work and organization of the AP Region that I hope to implement in our region. For instance, the AP Region nominates the new AP Director candidate (remember that regional directors are appointed by the President of ComSoc) from a list of active AP Board members who have attended half or more of the last two year's AP Board meetings.

**Stefano:** I agree that Regional Boards should meet in addition to working by email. How would you proceed to make the LA Board more efficient?

**Pedro:** Related to the first point, I believe that we need to have more LA Board meetings. Unfortunately, the ComSoc budget does not allow in-person meetings, so we are using virtual-meeting tools. We had our first virtual meeting last November. With the exception of some minor Internet connection problems, everything was fine. I think we should also add more members to the LA Board. Finding volunteers for the LA Board has not been easy. There are several positions within the Board that have not been filled so far. First, this generates overwork for the rest of the Board. Also, this decreases the possibility of finding suitable candidates to be the next LA Director.