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GlobalSIP: A New Flagship Conference

It was in the beautiful city of Vancouver in late May 2013 that we celebrated the 38th IEEE International Conference on Acoustics, Speech, and Signal Processing (ICASSP). Thanks to the excellent work of the organizing team led by Rabab Ward and Li Deng, it was again a wonderful event with the number of attendees reaching about 2,500—a new high for ICASSP, our first flagship conference.

In 1994, with the emergence of image and video processing, our second flagship conference, the IEEE International Conference on Image Processing (ICIP), was established. With an impressive average attendance of around 1,000, ICIP is also consistently a successful meeting. So now can we sit back and claim we have all that we need? Not yet.

First, since we don't have a fall flagship conference like ICASSP that accommodates all the fields in signal processing, our speech processing colleagues found a home for their fall meeting by growing a European regional conference into an association. At the same time, most of our European colleagues also gathered and formed a sizable European Signal Processing Conference (EUSIPCO) in the fall.

Perhaps I extrapolate too much. But it is true that given all the modern technology, the research and development cycle has sped up to the point where we have something new to report almost every six months, instead of every year. This increased need for meetings is evidenced by the fact that many of our sister Societies have both spring and fall meetings.

One can argue that we have enough meetings: ten to 15 workshops held per year and organized by each of the 12 technical committees (TCs). Yes, the workshops are a part of our unique IEEE Signal Processing Society (SPS) subculture.

I myself have organized/attended some workshops and enjoyed the cozy atmosphere that brought people close together with time to eat and chat all day in a remote paradise.

But what is the problem? If you have organized a workshop, you may already know the answer—the overhead in terms of manpower and finances is too high for a small event. The time and effort required to run a workshop can be greater than that of running a big conference such as ICASSP, which has an infrastructure to support the operation. So why not create an umbrella conference that takes care of all the administrative issues, and let each workshop concentrate on their own technical program?

Indeed the existing TC-centric infrastructure of ICASSP and ICIP brings us efficiency and convenience but also a rigid process that is not adaptive and flexible enough to address new emerging topics. While some special sessions may be included, it is not possible to dedicate a single track to a new topic and highlight it. More importantly, the existing structure may not attract people from outside of our community, those we would like to join.

To respond to the above-mentioned issues, the idea of the IEEE Global Conference on Signal and Information Processing (GlobalSIP) as a new symposia-based fall flagship conference was born—a conference essentially with a collection of colocated symposia. Each symposium has its own technical chairs and review processes. The symposia are tied together through colocation, cotiming, a shared plenary, nonoverlapping oral lecture sessions, parallel poster sessions, and a single registration fee. The first GlobalSIP will be held 3–5 December 2013 in Austin, Texas, organized by a team led by Ahmed Tewfik and Robert Heath.

There are several benefits to having multiple colocated symposia. The first benefit is the cross-fertilization of research ideas across the research community. Having broad oral sessions and interactive poster sessions in each symposium allows researchers in related fields to gain exposure to new ideas. Second, the symposia format will attract top talent in related fields that are outside our community. The symposia chairs will have the flexibility to design the symposium to match the needs of their community.

Long ago, there was an SPS policy that stated a flagship conference should be held two years in North America before going to Europe or Asia. Recognizing that the Society was an international organization with growing demand worldwide, during the Conference Board meeting during ICIP 2006, a motion was approved to abolish such a policy and to let the best proposal prevail. Ever since, both ICASSP and ICIP have been traveling around the world. Isn't it great that we are truly international?

But something else has been slowly fading. We started to see a gradual drop in membership in North America—our long-time base. SPS used to have around 50% of its members from this Region. In 2011, the U.S. membership was only 42% and then continued to drop to 41% in 2012. Therefore, the creation of GlobalSIP as a conference mainly located in North America can help address this issue.

All in all, GlobalSIP provides an umbrella for existing workshops to come together with a common infrastructure and overhead so that organizers can focus on the technical program, offers flexible infrastructure to address new emerging topics by bringing in new community, and addresses the demand of a fall meeting for fast technology turn-around time.

Come join us for the new SPS flagship conference—GlobalSIP!