



February 2021

ISSN 2374-1082

INTERVIEW

Latin America Region

Interview with Nury Gabriela Ramirez Cely, Director of the LA Region

By Stefano Bregni, Global Communications Newsletter Editor in Chief, Vice-President for Conferences, and Nury Gabriela Ramirez Cely, Director of the LA Region

This is the third article in the series of eight, started in December 2020 and published monthly in the IEEE ComSoc *Global Communications Newsletter*, which covers all areas of IEEE ComSoc Member and Global Activities. In this series of articles, I introduce the Vice-President and six Directors on the Member and Global Activities Council (namely: Sister and Related Societies; Membership Services; AP, NA, LA, EMEA Regions) and the two Chairs of the Women in Communications Engineering (WICE) and Young Professionals (YP) Standing Committees. In each article, one by one they present their sector activities and plans.

In this issue, I interview Nury Gabriela Ramirez Cely, Director of the LA Region.

This opportunity is a big pleasure for me! I had the pleasure to appreciate the outstanding dedication of Nury to serve ComSoc many times already, beginning with her previous appointment as Chair of the IEEE ComSoc Young Professionals Standing Committee. Besides all that, she is from Guadalajara, which is definitely one of the nicest places in Mexico (and home of the best quality Tequilas!). Last time I visited Guadalajara was two years ago for IEEE LATINCOM 2018, which was a very successful conference.

Nury currently works as a Software Project Manager for HCL in Guadalajara, Mexico. She has very broad experience in high technology companies, like Continental Automotive and Cisco Systems, and she worked for nine years at Intel Corporation as well, where she held several Program Manager positions in R&D groups that have enriched her career. She was the Chair of ComSoc's Young Professionals Committee from 2018 to 2019, the Chair of the IEEE Guadalajara Section (Mexico) from 2019 to 2020; and has held several positions in her young volunteer career at IEEE. Nury received her Bachelor in electronics and communications engineering from Ecuador and the Master's in quality engineering and management from ITESO in Mexico.

Stefano: Hello Nury! Let us begin our interview by explaining the key points of the Latin America region of the IEEE Communications Society.

Nury: The Latin America (LA) region in ComSoc covers all countries in Central and South America from Mexico to Argentina, and the Caribbean Sea, namely Puerto Rico and Trinidad y Tobago islands. Latin America in ComSoc represents less than 5 percent of the whole membership. Despite that, we have 25 Chapters and 41 Student Branch Chapters, all extremely active.

One recent news item I would like to tell you about is we increased our membership 15 percent comparing December

2019 and December 2020. I would say this is a result of the quality and singularity of new activities we have offered.

Stefano: Would you like to mention any special initiative that you started in your term as Director?

Nury: I would tell you about two key initiatives: First, the ComSoc Latin American Board (LAB) launched in 2019 the IEEE ComSoc LA Monthly Newsletter. It has the same concept as the *Global Communication Newsletter* that you lead so well.

The LA Newsletter is managed by Andrea Carrion, our Newsletter coordinator. She manages to put together information about new Senior Members in the region, past activities highlights and incoming activities promotion. This has been a good way to get closer to our members and provide a channel for them to know more about the Society.

Second, the re-vitalized image of the ComSoc LA Region, by means of the social networks and web page. As you know, this is important specifically for our students and young professional members, as well as to gain more visibility outside of the IEEE community.

Stefano: What about the committee members working with you in the ComSoc LAB?

Nury: The ComSoc LAB is formed by a diverse and experienced group of eleven people that coordinate and support the different committees. They are:

- Gidy Florez, Student Activities
- Andres Navarro, Industry Relations
- Yessica Sáez, Social Networks and Webpage
- Fabricio Carvalho, DLT and DSP
- Sandra Hidalgo, Membership Development

- Héctor Poveda, Technical Activities
- Esmeralda Asurza, Secretary
- Fredy Campos, Volunteer Training
- Andrea Carrion, Newsletter
- Jose David Cely, Awards
- Carlos Lozano, Advisor

We have developed strong confidence among us that has made easier the collaborative work.

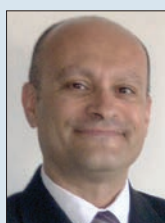
Stefano: Can you mention any opportunities that ComSoc has in Latin America?

Nury: Being a community of 1,450 members up to this month, we have the potential for growth. We, as the other regions, have the challenge of increasing the value of benefits offered to industry professionals as well as increasing the members in this segment. One of the critical points that usually our members tell us about is the ComSoc membership fee; for some countries with high inflation rates, maintaining the Society affiliation becomes harder. Thus, it is crucial that we find new ways to increase the value of what we offer.

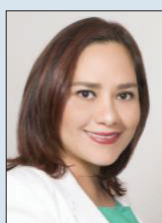
Stefano: What are the needs of members in Latin America, which you have identified through this first year as Director?

Nury: LA members have acknowledged that they want to be part of ComSoc because they want to remain current, obtain publications and have the opportunity of professional networking. In addition, they have stated that their preferred benefits are conferences, printed magazines, and online webinars. (2020 All Society Research survey results). Based on that,

(Continued on Newsletter page 4)



Stefano Bregni



Nury Gabriela Ramirez Cely

IEEE Latin-American Conference on Communications 2020 (LATINCOM)

By Fabrizio Granelli, University of Trento, Italy; Carlos Lozano, Universidad de los Andes, Colombia; Octavia Dobre, Memorial University, Canada; Oscar Caicedo, Universidad del Cauca, Colombia; Gidy Carolina Florez Navarro, Brazilian Center for Research in Physics (CBPF), Brasil; Nury Gabriela Ramirez Cely, Continental Automotive, Mexico

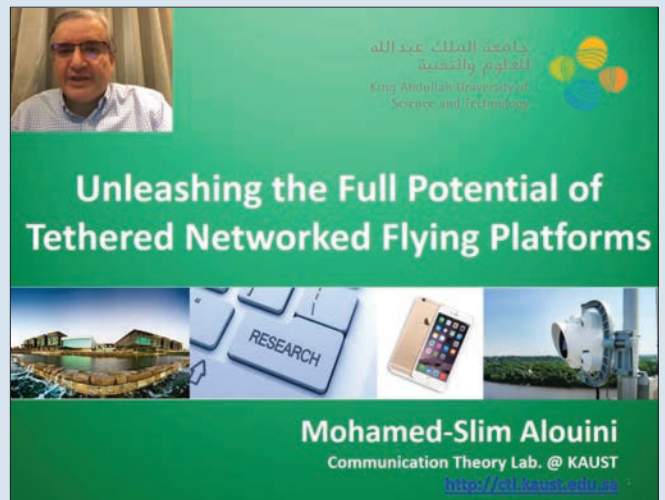
IEEE LATINCOM 2020 was originally planned to be held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, but was held online due to the pandemic outbreak from November 18 to November 20, 2020. Still, this flagship communications conference for the Latin America region was able to attract 144 submissions, 67 of those accepted for the main technical program of the conference. Quite an achievement! As a result, international authors from more than 20 countries around the world discussed their most recent advances in the field of communications in the three-day event.

The final technical program consisted of 18 Technical Sessions, seven Keynotes, two tutorials, and one Young Professional Panel. Keynotes presentations covered the hottest and most interesting advances in telecommunications, including: tethered networked flying platforms, application-driven network slicing, IoT for healthcare, smart cities, IoT, IRTF activities and QUIC transport protocol.

Co-located with the main conference, a competition targeted to young Society members called "LATINCOM Hackathon" was held, where teams were challenged to create solutions to local problems with the help of their telecommunications skills. The guidelines of this competition followed the same of the IEEE ComSoc Student Competition, to motivate students and Young Professionals from Region 9 to have an experience in how to elaborate their ideas and encourage them to participate with their projects implemented in the future. In the next editions of this ComSoc competition. The competition had the support of the R9 IEEE Humanitarian Activities Committee as well as THE IEEE ComSoc LA region. The three best ideas and their technical solutions were awarded with prizes, sponsored



One of the many pristine beaches in Santo Domingo. Will we meet there next November?



Mohamed-Slim Alouini presenting a keynote on Tethered Networked Flying Platforms.

by the Membership Development Support Grant from the IEEE Comsoc Member Services Board.

The competition had the support of various professionals in the telecommunications area and IEEE ComSoc volunteers who provided their time to mentor the teams on the technical structure of the projects. A total of seven teams (24 participants) from six countries submitted their projects in the following areas: cybersecurity, E-health, FTT-GPON, sensors and Internet of Things. There were many interesting ideas we expect to be implemented soon. The top three projects were:

- Sustainable Pluviometric Monitoring Network for Agriculture. Team "Sem Fronteiras" (Brasil): Gustavo Viana Penido (Universidade de Brasília), Carlos Alexandre de Almeida Pires (Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora), Gabrielle Cristina de Souza Silva (Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro).
- Monitoring System to Optimize Water Use in the Agricultural Sector Based on IoT. Team "SIMAGRA" (Ecuador): Andrea Villa, Daniel Almeida, Katherine Fajardo, Pedro Pineda. Universidad Politécnica Salesiana - Cuenca.
- Design of an IOT System for Monitoring the Bahuaja Sonene National Park. Team "ZAMZ" (Peru): Luis Zuazo Cuenca, Joshua Mayta Taboada, Franco Apolinario Soto, Kevin Sedano Gonzalez. Universidad Nacional del Callao.

Overall, the conference was attended by 123 registered participants, who were able to interact through a dedicated online social platform (gather.town) during the conference and to appreciate the technical content for an entire month after its official closing ceremony.

IEEE LATINCOM 2021 will be held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, as was originally planned for 2020. We hope that next November an easing of the pandemic will allow international travel in safety. You are all welcome to attend this great event in a great location!

Madrid, March 2020: A Distinguished Lecturer, a Conference and a Virus

By Víctor P. Gil Jiménez, University Carlos III de Madrid, IEEE SPS/ComSoc Joint Spain Chapter Chair, Spain, and Gaurav Sharma, North Carolina State University, IEEE Distinguished Lecturer, USA

Once upon a time, there were a distinguished lecturer, a conference and a virus. Wait, what is this? We know that the audience of this newsletter expects a technical report on activities. We know that this is not the typical article in this section. We know that you probably expect a different story, but some months ago the COVID-19 appeared and the world was turned upside down. We had to settle to new situations and new scenarios. We had to change our activities and our way of doing them. We had to modify our ways of interacting with people and communication. Now, after more than half a year, somehow, we are used to do it, but what happened just in the very beginning when there were more uncertainties than facts?

This is the adventure of a Distinguished Lecturer, Dr. Gaurav Sharma. The story began in November 2019, more or less the same time that the virus. The organizers of the IEEE Student Women in Engineering and Young Professional (SWYP) 2020 Conference contacted me (Víctor) to request my collaboration, as the IEEE Spanish Signal Processing and Communications Joint chapter chair. The idea was to rely on the IEEE Distinguished Lecture program to bring to Spain a recognized scientist, Dr. Gaurav Sharma, to give a talk at this conference and is some other places in Spain. The deal was very attractive, a win-win opportunity. The organizers had the possibility to have a distinguished speaker at the conference at very low cost, Dr. Sharma would have a very large audience, and the chapter would gain more visibility of their activities, giving added value to their members and making efficient use of their resources.

The conference was scheduled for 12-14 March 2020 in Zaragoza. In November, I contacted to Dr. Sharma to explain the plan. We needed more than one country for the tour so I also contacted several countries in Europe. Finally, we organized jointly with the French Chapter. Everything was organized and ready in January and we received final approval from ComSoc.



University Carlos III de Madrid inner Yard. A ghost campus in March 2020 due to the pandemic.

March arrived quickly, and news of the virus came very fast in these days too. The lectures were scheduled as follows: March 11 in Madrid, March 13 in Zaragoza as the conference plenary, and March 14 in Malaga. From there, Dr. Sharma would fly to France for other lectures.

The adventure began. Dr. Sharma arrived in Madrid on the morning of March 9. This day in the afternoon, the authorities in Madrid ordered the lockdown by Wednesday, March 11 to give some time for people to plan accordingly. The DL in Madrid on March 11 was automatically cancelled. The conference was still alive by Tuesday. Dr. Sharma took the train to Zaragoza knowing already that the talk in Málaga was also cancelled. Upon arrival at Zaragoza, the authorities in Zaragoza cancelled the event. In few days, the situation with the virus in Spain became a nightmare, and not only here. During this week there was an explosion of cases throughout the world. The USA started to close for people coming from Europe. At this point, Dr. Sharma and I decided that the best idea was also to cancel the lectures in France and come back to the USA as soon as possible before they closed. He managed to change his flight ticket for Sunday. I was very worried that Dr. Sharma was infected here. Fortunately, he arrived safely at home and without the virus as a gift.

The situation and the mood of our souls can be expressed through the photo above taken by Dr. Sharma on Wednesday morning on the campus of the University Carlos III de Madrid. The weather is cloudy, the campus is empty, the fountain used to decorate the inner yard of the campus is turned off. A ghost campus on Wednesday where two days before it was full of students, people, activities, stories, and life.

(Continued on Newsletter page 4)

CHAPTER REPORT

Webinars During Covid-19: "ideas * knowledge = ∞"

By Matež Hribernik, Secretary YP Slovenia, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

During Covid-19 young professionals from Slovenia organised several online technical events with the support of the ComSoc chapter. We wanted to present various professional research projects in different fields. At the start of the year, we expected to have these events organized in a meetup fashion. As this was not possible due to pandemic, we chose an alternate with streamed live events. The webinar series was titled "ideas * knowledge == ∞". With the title we wanted to express that only good ideas and profound knowledge can equal the impossible, the success, even though the title can be considered a mathematical oxymoron. With the title we wanted to express. Using Facebook Live, we were able to organise five webinars. The presentations covered topics such as robotics, (RF) circuit design, deep learning, recommender systems and computational linguistics. We are glad that talented young researchers and experienced assistants from different faculties and institutes in Slovenia were willing to present their work, teach new skills and answer questions from the audience. The webinars took place in June (1x), July (1x) and September (3x) 2020.



Peter Kmecl presenting his work in robotics. Listeners were able to watch webinar and ask questions in comments on Facebook.

The first webinar presenter was assistant Peter Kmecl, MSc. In his webinar he presented his work in the field of autonomous robot design. His presentation covered hardware and software design as well as control applications. The second webinar was held by the young researcher Blaž Bertalančič, MSc. In his presentation he addressed the problem of circuit design from the perspective of an ICT engineer who designs high-frequency circuits for the first time. The presentation included recom-

(Continued on Newsletter page 4)

INTERVIEW/Continued from page 1

ComSoc LAB is fostering the organization of local conferences within each chapter Section, as well as strengthening IEEE LAT-INCOM, the ComSoc Latin American and Caribbean flagship conference that has improved year by year. We also plan to continue with the webinars opened to the whole professional community improving the quality of speakers and their topics.

Stefano: I am glad you mention LATINCOM, which has been consolidated as the reference conference on Communications in the whole LA Region, but also with significant global participation! I feel a special personal commitment with LATINCOM, as I have been working for this conference for the last 10 years and I am now the Steering Committee Chair, after the founder Nelson Fonseca. In your opinion, what is the significance of LATINCOM for LA ComSoc Members?

Nury: LATINCOM is gAINING more relevance each year, being a reference for researchers and scientists in our region. As you say, with global participation in the organizing committee and keynotes presentations covering the most interesting topics in communications, it has attracted authors from different continents of the world. We have demonstrated our volunteer's capability to organize an international and high-level impact Conference, according to the standards of IEEE ComSoc. Nevertheless, I envision a conference that attracts more Latin American and Caribbean authors to showcase the level of investigation and applications done here.

Talking about some highlights of last year's conference, we were able to offer two main unprecedented advantages for the audience: first, a zero conference fee for ComSoc students; and second, a Hackathon as part of the conference program. This Hackathon called seven groups of students from LA that presented projects that tackle local communities' problems with solutions based on telecommunication topic implementation. The awards were sponsored by the Membership development Support Grant from the IEEE Comsoc Member Services Board for the first three best projects.

Stefano: What other recent initiatives run by the ComSoc LAB would you like to highlight briefly?

Nury: Last year, we started a Webinars series, in conjunction with the support of the chapter chairs to find local speakers among their communities and not precisely IEEE ComSoc members. These webinars were offered every week, from April to September, at no cost to anyone, to deliver key information on application and research done in Latin America in several trending communications topics.

Stefano: Do you have any recent news you wish to share with the readers of GCN?

Nury: Yes. In the last quarter of 2020, we offered two key projects that were received positively. One was the Industry-Students panel, with the intention of helping students understand the needs of the industry, receive valuable feedback, and adapt their projects accordingly. During this panel, the students presented their work to industry professionals or panelists by means of a teleconference, and the panelists judged the work based on industry interests, existing standards, and real needs of the market. The other project was the Student Paper competition, aimed to award the outstanding students' work carried out at the undergraduate or postgraduate level. These were funded by ComSoc as an opportunistic situation, that ComSoc MGA will continue pursuing due to the great response from the members.

DISTINGUISHED LECTURER TOUR/Continued from page 3

One month later, we organized one of the first virtual Distinguished Lectures with some of the topics Dr. Sharma was planning to cover in his in-person talks. Probably it was too early because people were a little bit confused with the situation and very busy managing children at home and at the same time teleworking. The talk, unfortunately, did not have the audience we expected, but it was nice to at least have it virtually. I (Víc-tor) had the opportunity to say thanks to Dr. Sharma for his willingness to coming here and his attitude in this strange and hard situation he had to feel. He was always positive and optimistic, making it easier for organizing and decision-making. In the future, when everything returns to normal, he is invited to give a talk in person.

The lessons learned with this situation are that activities can be moved to virtual with relative success if the timing and the publicity are correct. In addition, that IEEE network is very important for handling these situations, while emphasizing how much work still has to be done.

WEBINARS/Continued from page 3

Recommendations that every engineer or student should follow when designing communication circuits.

Assistant Professor Domen Verber, Ph.D., presented in the third webinar on the basics of deep learning and computer vision. This presentation was especially interesting as the speaker is the ambassador of the NVidia Deep Learning Institute at the University of Maribor and has more than two decades of experience in this field.

The fourth presentation was held by an assistant, Mladen Borovič, MSc. The presentation included the basics of recommender systems, a presentation of some of the most commonly used methods and practical implementations. The presentation concluded with modern and advanced approaches to recommender systems.

Assistant Jani Dugonik, MSc, gave the last presentation in the field of machine translation. After a short introduction to the field and basic techniques, we also learned about modern translation techniques using large amounts of translated data. The webinar ended with the presentation of modern machine translation tools and some modern examples.

In the course of a year, the webinars have reached over 550 views. This gives us encouragement to continue with our quest of connecting young engineers in Slovenia. We hope that next year we will be able to host these events in person and share our experience and knowledge as meetup events. Webinars are a suitable substitute during this period of Covid-19, but we believe that young engineers need and long for somewhat less official meetings where free thought and ideas can emerge and are encouraged.

The webinars (in Slovenian) are available on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IEEEYPSlovenia/videos>

**GLOBAL
COMMUNICATIONS
NEWSLETTER**

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ISSN 2374-1082