DLT in Latin America

Speaker: Hikmet Sari, Supelec, France

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Cities: Lima (Peru), Bogota and Bucaramanga (Colombia), Quito (Ecuador), and Panama City (Panama).

It all started at the Welcome Reception of ICC 2002 in Anchorage last May when Bhaskar Sengupta, Director, Membership Programs Development, asked me if I would be ready to go on a Distinguished Lecture Tour (DLT) in Latin America. I presume he had had a positive feedback from the Asia-Pacific Region, where I went for a two-week tour covering Taipei, Hong Kong, Seoul, Tokyo and Singapore in November/December 2002, and he wanted me to go to another region. Since my only trips to Latin America in the past were to Rio de Janeiro and to San Salvador, I wanted to see more of this region, and I gave a positive answer to Bhaskar. He immediately introduced me to Jorge Hedderwick, Director, Latin America Region. I then had a short conversation with Jorge and volunteered to go on a tour in Latin America provided there is a sufficient interest from the Local Chapters in my topics and we can find a convenient time period. I indicated to him that the best time would be August, just before the term starts in our schools and universities.

I had almost forgotten that conversation in Alaska when I received an e-mail from Jorge on 4 July confirming that there is a strong interest from Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and Panama, and asking me to inquire about the flights. In terms of timing, it was just the perfect fit: I was invited to give a series of lectures during the last two weeks of August, just between my summer vacation and the beginning of the term. Jorge informed me that Ms. Araceli Garcia Gomez, Guadalajara Chapter Chair, would be organizing my tour working with the Local Chapters in the host countries. Araceli did a great job making the contacts and arranging the logistics. The tour was organized over two weeks such that I had two days of lecture in each country and one day for traveling from one country to another.

In my previous tour in the Asia-Pacific Region, I only gave one talk in each visited country, and the topic was Broadband Wireless Access, which is my primary talk advertised on the ComSoc website. For this tour in Latin America, there was a bigger expectation from the Local Chapters, and I was asked to give two or more lectures on different topics in each country. Fortunately, in addition to my usual lecture on Broadband Wireless Access, I had a presentation ready on Broadband Cable Access. With the exception of Columbia, where I was asked to give the first lecture in two
different cities, I gave the two lectures in each country and thus covered the fields of both wireless and cable access.

The tour started on Monday, 18 August, with a flight from Paris to Lima via Miami. Every time I have an overseas flight with a connection, I get worried not to miss the connection. The flight to Miami was perfectly on time, and I immediately proceeded to the check-in counter of the airline for the flight to Lima. I had a real fright when the lady at the counter looked at my ticket and said: Sir, your reservation to Lima is for Wednesday, 20 August. Suddenly, my talks in Lima scheduled for the next two days seemed in jeopardy. I was preparing myself to tell her that I needed to get to Lima whatever it costs when she unexpectedly tore my ticket and handed a boarding pass to me. It seemed unbelievable, because sometimes when something goes wrong, everything goes wrong. But I was lucky this time; I had just been given a boarding pass to get to Lima that same day and without any additional charge. I felt so relieved and thought: Always double check and even triple check the work of your travel agent and assistant!

On my arrival at the Lima airport, Mr. Jefferson Lopez Goycochea from the University of San Martin de Porres was waiting for me. My two talks in Lima were scheduled as invited talks within the framework of INTERCON 2003 (the 10th edition of an international conference on electrical and systems engineering) organized by the Student Branch of that university. I gave my talk on Broadband Cable Access on Tuesday morning, and my talk on Broadband Wireless Access on Wednesday afternoon. The attendance was about 40 people. One of the reasons for not having more people was perhaps that the talks were a part of a large conference with a number of parallel sessions. The talks were translated into Spanish by a student working with me in a ping pong mode. Every half a minute, I was stopping to give him the floor to translate what I have just said.

My short stay in Lima was memorable. The Local Chapter had some other guests from Brazil, Argentina and France, and they organized a tour for us in the old city on Wednesday morning. We visited the places of interest of Lima and I learned quite a bit on the history of Peru. I will also remember the restaurant Los Cantaros, where we had two lunches and I discovered the delicious Seviche and Pisco Sour. You should try these specialties in Los Cantaros whenever you have a chance to visit Lima.

My flight from Lima to Bogota on Thursday, 21 August, was at 6 a.m., so that night was very short for me. Fortunately, I could get some sleep during the flight and I was in a good shape when I arrived in Bogota. There, Aldo Forero, Chair of the Colombia Chapter, was waiting for me. After lunch and some rest at the hotel, Jose David Cely, Treasurer of the Chapter, took me to the Distrital University to visit the
Local Student Branch. I was impressed by the number of students who came to talk to me. After the visit, a group of students took Jose-David and me for dinner and we continued to exchange our views on different topics. The group was so friendly!

My talk in Bogota was scheduled for Friday, 22 August, 9 a.m. at the University of San Buenaventura. When I arrived at the university, I saw a big line of people waiting to register to the lecture. Obviously, the lecture was strongly advertised. At 9 a.m., the amphitheater was completely full. I was told that the main amphitheater had a capacity of 160 seats only and that since over 270 people registered to the lecture, video conferencing facilities were installed so that the remaining people could attend on a large screen in the amphitheater next door. I was honored when Mr. Frey Fernando Garzon, Rector of the University, welcomed me both in Spanish and in French, and most of all, when they played the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*, for me. This was the first time in my life!

In the afternoon, Jose David took me to the airport and we traveled together to Bucaramanga, where my next lecture was scheduled. During the flight from Bogota to Bucaramanga the sight from the airplane window was truly impressive; and even more impressive was the landing at the 2000-meter high airport at the top of the mountains. When we arrived at the hotel, a group of students from the Local Student Branch were waiting to take us on a short city tour and dinner. On this Friday evening, the city was very lively, but still it seemed very peaceful.

My lecture was scheduled for 9 a.m. on Saturday morning. The attendance was around 200, mostly students from local universities. This is a huge number for a mid-size provincial city like Bucaramanga. After my talk, I was interviewed by Representatives of the Local Student Branch. They asked me a long list of questions among which: How do I see the future of telecommunications in Latin America? How a student in a country like Columbia can do research in communications? What opportunities can be opened to them in other countries? I tried to advise them as much as I could.

In the afternoon, Jose David and I flew back to Bogota, and the next day (Sunday, 24 August) I left Bogota for Quito, the capital city of Ecuador. At the airport, I was welcomed (in perfect French) by Galo Gascante Lopez, the Local Section Chair. Taking advantage of my visit, the chapter had organized a two-day seminar entitled *Broadband Access: State-of-the-Art and Future Trends*. My lectures were scheduled as the morning sessions of the seminar, which had some 50 attendees. The Monday afternoon session was a presentation entitled *Broadband Services* from the national operator *Andinatel*. The Tuesday afternoon session consisted of a presentation followed by a demo on ADSL Technology from the local Alcatel organization. In this way, the seminar covered all broadband access technologies including wireless,
hybrid fiber/coax cable and ADSL. No translation into Spanish was provided for my two talks, but the afternoon sessions by local speakers were in Spanish. The audience was from industry, service providers and universities. This seminar was a good example of how a Local ComSoc Chapter can combine a DLT with other presentations and organize a larger event.

Quito is almost on the equator. Galo took me to the monument erected on the equator at Longitude 78° 27’ 8” West, which is a major attraction for both visitors and locals. There, you can have your picture taken with one foot in the northern hemisphere and one in the southern hemisphere, which we both did. The next day, we visited the historic part of Quito, where I admired the numerous churches and other colonial buildings. The old city is truly worth seeing, particularly after dark with its magic illuminations.

On Wednesday, 27 August, I had my flight from Quito to Panama City, the final stop of my DLT. At the airport, I was welcomed by Gustavo Giaz, Chair of the Local Comsoc Section and Eduardo Gonzalez, its Treasurer. After checking-in at the hotel, I was taken to the office of the Local IEEE Chapter, where the Chair, Tania Quiel was waiting for us. After signing the Guest Book and having a few pictures taken in the office, we all went for dinner in a splendid seafood restaurant.

My lectures in Panama City were scheduled as late afternoon sessions from 6 to 9 p.m. (on Thursday and Friday, 28-29 August) so that both academics and people from industry and other organizations can attend after their daily work. A professional interpreter was hired to provide simultaneous translation of my talks into Spanish. Attendance was quite modest (30-35 people), essentially because it was still the summer vacation period, but there was a lot of interest in the lectures, judging from the number of questions and the discussions after the talks.

During my stay in Panama, Gustavo took me to a tour along the Panama Canal and to a city tour. At the canal, we visited the main operations center, where you can still see a lot of machinery from the 1930s. Panama City is an interesting city which gathers the characteristics of Latin America and those of US cities.

Overall, this tour has been very rewarding. On one hand, I was happy to serve the Local Chapters and help Student Branches in several countries of Latin America. On the other hand, I discovered new countries, met very friendly people there and enjoyed the Latin hospitality. With many of them, I will be keeping contact and we will surely meet again in the near future, be it in Latin America or here in Paris.