

VISAPP / VISIGRAPP 2010

In February 2010, I announced on my website that I had resigned from being Program Chair of VISAPP / VISIGRAPP 2010. The reasons for this decision were communicated by email to the members of the Program Committee and my webpage suggested to other people curious about this, to contact me by email. Due to many requests, I finally publish the following information here.

In 2009, I was invited to become program chair of VISAPP 2010 and, having been a keynote speaker previously, accepted the invitation with pleasure. The conference organizers, [INSTICC](#), didn't tell what exactly they expected from me, so I proposed my view that I should

- oversee the assignment of papers to PC members and
- handle the actual acceptance decisions (the review site being managed by INSTICC).

It was then agreed that I would finalize the assignment of papers, starting from an initial automatic assignment based on keywords (areas of expertise / paper topics) and that I would handle the decision process. Without going too much into details: my intention was to base decisions on the reviews naturally, the most important task of the program chair being the handling of papers with divergent reviews or borderline marks. As for divergent reviews, I intended to send these to the reviewers (anonymously of course) to potentially get revised opinions, as is common and good practice in other conferences.

Close to the paper submission deadline, I contacted the conference organizers, in order to prepare the paper assignment process together. Several days later I was told that the following day, the keyword-based assignment would be ready and that I could take over. Then I was without any news for two weeks (!), despite another enquiry from my side. After these two weeks without news, the organizers told me that they had experienced problems with the reviewing software and thus had to do the reviewer assignment themselves. Such technical problems do happen of course, but the absence of any timely communication about them, was rather disturbing.

In order to avoid such problems during the actual decision process, I re-contacted the organizers two weeks before the review deadline, with questions about the review site. Despite reminders from my side, there was no reply by the organizers. The next thing was that I learnt (by accident, i.e. the conference organizers didn't tell me) that acceptance notifications had been sent on schedule to paper authors!

I offered the conference organizers the chance to explain what happened or to inform me of any misconduct or misunderstanding from my side. They didn't make any reproach to me and offered their apologies, mentioning again technical problems with the review software, that the "paper selection module" was only working on their local server at the time. I then decided to resign from my position of program chair. The reasons for this should be obvious by now, but I summarize them in order to avoid any misunderstanding:

1. I wasn't involved in the paper review and decision process; this simply is contradictory with me remaining program chair.
2. There was a total lack of communication on the side of the conference organizers during the review process, see above for details.
3. Absence of efforts towards finding an alternative solution to involve me in the decision process. Recall that the problem seems to have been that the "paper selection module" was not accessible from the outside. I can think of at least two simple solutions to this problem: (i) dump all the reviews in whatever format (Excel, PDF, CSV, ...) and send this to me by email – the conference organizers develop the review system in-house apparently, so this shouldn't have been a problem. (ii) Tell me about the problem and invite me to take the plane to join the organizers in Portugal for a few days.

Instead of finding a solution together, the organizers didn't even inform me, didn't reply to my

emails and didn't even delay the acceptance notifications.

In an email to the program committee, one of the conference organizers wrote that "I believe Prof. Sturm left unsatisfied mainly due to technical problems with the information system...". This is incorrect; again, everybody can accept that technical problems do occur, but what can not be accepted is a total lack of communication and of efforts towards finding solutions to mentioned problems.

When the conference organizers finally replied to my enquiries (10 days after sending out acceptance notifications) they invited me to:

- simulate my own acceptance decisions (the review software seemed to be working by then), in order to compare them with the ones already made official and "discuss" the result, but not change it of course.
- make decisions on the so-called position papers (30+ submissions out of 250+).

Since the reply I received didn't justify what happened before (see all of the above and issues 1 to 3), I decided to withdraw from the position of program chair. I did not simulate my own acceptance decisions – in the case they were different from the final ones already made by the conference organizers this would have been problematic for them and in the opposite case, saying in hindsight that I agree with decisions, would only justify an otherwise opaque and inappropriate selection process. However, before resigning, I still sent my suggestions on the position papers (which weren't decided yet) to the organizers; I don't know if these suggestions were adopted.

Final remarks

- I believe that acceptance decisions for VISAPP 2010 were made by [José Braz](#). Please contact him or the conference secretariat for further enquiries about the selection process.
- What is written on this webpage is true to the best of my conscience.
- I'm grateful for any opinion and feedback. Thanks!

Last updated on May 3, 2010