

Preface

This year the SOFSEM conference is coming back to Milovy in Moravia to be held for the 26th time. Although born as a local Czechoslovak event 25 years ago SOFSEM did not miss the opportunity offered in 1989 by the newly found freedom in our part of Europe and has evolved into a full-fledged international conference. For all the changes, however, it has kept its generalist and multi-disciplinary character. The tracks of invited talks, ranging from Trends in Theory to Software and Information Engineering, attest to this. Apart from the topics mentioned above, SOFSEM '99 offers invited talks exploring core technologies, talks tracing the path from data to knowledge, and those describing a wide variety of applications.

The rich collection of invited talks presents one traditional facet of SOFSEM: that of a winter school, in which IT researchers and professionals get an opportunity to see more of the large pasture of today's computing than just their favourite grazing corner. To facilitate this purpose the prominent researchers delivering invited talks usually start with a broad overview of the state of the art in a wider area and then gradually focus on their particular subject.

Apart from being a winter school, SOFSEM is a conference where outstanding submitted contributions selected by the programme committee are presented in shorter contributed talks also published in the proceedings. This year the 23 members of the programme committee, coming from 8 countries, evaluated 45 submissions, with several sub-referees joining the effort. After careful review, followed by a comprehensive discussion at a PC meeting held at the end of June, 18 contributions were selected for presentation at SOFSEM '99. At SOFSEM the invited and contributed talks will be supplemented, as usual, by refereed posters and by flash communications.

Throughout its history, SOFSEM has served as a meeting ground for professionals from both the theoretical and the practical side of computing. Alas, the fence dividing those two still exists after all these years. Yes, there have always been holes in it and some of you may insist that they are getting larger lately. Having lived on both sides I find it difficult to judge; at any rate I believe that placing SOFSEM squarely across the fence is and will remain useful.

There are many people whose contribution to the preparation of SOFSEM '99 I acknowledge gratefully – and gladly. Gerard Tel as the co-chair has done much to make the programme committee work smoothly and productively. He has been a great help and a great pal, taking the initiative whenever he sensed (rightly) that it was time to step in. The members of the PC were hard working and disciplined. Some were special: Peter van Emde Boas and Torben Hagerup went well beyond their assignments. The names of all PC members as well as those of the sub-referees are recorded elsewhere. Together they made the selection process – rather difficult this year – balanced and fair. Having a paper refused is not exactly an exhilarating experience, but more often than not the author

received a detailed analysis of the contribution, suggesting improvements and providing hints for further research.

It has been proven possible to have a SOFSEM without Jan Staudek leading the organizing committee, without Jiří Sochor serving as the PC secretary, or without Miroslav Bartošek taking care of the proceedings. Nevertheless, I am glad I was lucky enough not to have to try. Working with Jan, Jiří, and Miroslav saved me much sweat and some embarrassment. Now that Springer-Verlag (whose continuing trust in SOFSEM is very much appreciated) publishes LNCS in both printed and electronic form, editing the proceedings is more complicated; fortunately we had Petr Sojka and Aleš Křenek to help, with Petr Sojka taking over most of the burden.

To my colleagues in the SOFSEM steering committee I owe my gratitude not only for guidance and advice, but also for recruiting most of the invited speakers.

During the transition to an international event we have been able to stick to the tradition of making SOFSEM affordable to the public from Central and Eastern Europe and even support the participation of graduate and post-graduate students financially. This is due to the generosity of our sponsors whose names are also recorded in these proceedings.

Having said my thanks I now get to wishes. I recall Jan Staudek responding to complaints about meeting in Milovy again and again by noting that the Hawaii Conference on System Sciences does not move from Hawaii and nobody seems to protest. Well, I must admit that apart from clear air and abundance of vegetation our venue does not offer the sort of attraction Hawaii does. On the other hand, less tourist attraction means less distraction, making the participants huddle together during whatever free time the busy schedule of SOFSEM allows for. This can be used in various productive ways—from planning joint research and projects to sitting at the feet of the veterans and soaking up war stories and tricks of the trade. I hope the participants will enjoy all that SOFSEM '99 has to offer, both on and off its time-table.

August 1999

Jan Pavelka

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