CrossMark

EDITORIAL

Disciplinary Pluralism, Flagship Conferences, and Journal Submissions

Armin Heinzl · Martin Bichler · Wil van der Aalst

BISE has made huge efforts during the past years to master the diversity of subject topics, research paradigms, and research methods in our discipline. The sub-division into seven distinct departments was a strenuous attempt to accommodate and nourish the different research streams in our community. This culture of pluralism implies merits and challenges. While other journals tend to emphasize specific research topics or streams, BISE intends to be a research platform for a multitude of research streams in information systems with an emphasis on the development of novel technological artifacts. Such a strategy bears the inherent risk of fragmentation and requires the commitment and support of those scholars who are highly renowned in the respective research stream. Furthermore, it demands structural flexibility, since a technology driven research discipline faces constant change. New topics emerge, interest in older topics levels off. Our department structure is not set in concrete but aims to adapt as disciplines evolve. At the same time, it should provide stability and define the key research streams in business and information systems engineering in a time where short-term IT-trends and an increasing number of methods and topics seem to challenge the identity of the field.

Until a research contribution finally is published in a major scholarly journal, it passes through several stages. In their inception phase, new research ideas or concepts are presented within the own research institution, at colloquia, seminars or at informal workshops. Research in progress or first results may be submitted to international or national conferences in order to conduct a first quality check and simultaneously seek scholarly feedback to improve the research. In the last stage, scholars attempt to publish further developed papers in academic journals (Halpern and Parkes 2011). Thus, conferences play a crucial role in presenting intermediate research results to obtain useful feedback and to "fish for" invitations from renowned editors of high quality journals. This phenomenon poses two questions:

1. Do the flagship conferences in our discipline cope with the multi-disciplinary breadth as well as depth of our field and do they provide sufficient incentives to submit high quality papers?
2. What should the interlinkage between conferences and journal submissions look like in order to combine parsimony and impact?

Regarding the first question it has to be noted that there is such diversity in specialized conferences and workshops that this editorial is not able to honor them all. Specialization themes such as Business Process Management, Software Engineering, Design Science, Decision Support, Outsourcing, Social Media, Knowledge Management and the like define common subject and social boundaries of interest. It is the expected and perceived quality of the feedback, the socialization and feeling at ease within the subject community, and the access to high quality journals

Prof. Dr. A. Heinzl (✉)
Chair of General Management and Information Systems,
University of Mannheim, 68161 Mannheim, Germany
e-mail: heinzl@uni-mannheim.de

Prof. Dr. M. Bichler
Department of Informatics, Decision Sciences and Systems,
Technical University of Munich (TUM), Boltzmannstr 3,
85748 Munich, Germany

Prof. Dr. Ir. W. van der Aalst
Department of Mathematics and Computer Science (MF 7.103),
Eindhoven University of Technology, PO Box 513,
5600, MB, Eindhoven, The Netherlands

🖄 Springer

in the form of regular or fast-tracked special issues which may provide further incentives to attend these specialized events. One important aspect relates to the visibility of research in a specialized conference.

A researcher who tills his field well is visible in his specialized community per se. But a researcher who attends a generic conference that combines more than one specialized subject field is likely to also be perceived by scholars from other subject disciplines. Thus, every scholar has the opportunity to enhance his or her reach, to obtain more diverse feedback and inspirations for her/his own work. This may be one reason why universalistic conferences – if consciously and well managed – attract more participants than highly specialized conferences. They can develop into a gravitational field.

But to which extent are the flagship conferences in our discipline universalistic? The largest conference in Information Systems is the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS). The most prominent regional conferences include AMCIS for the Americas, ECIS for EMEA, and PACIS for Asia/Pacific, as well as the Hawaii International Conference on Systems Science (HICSS) which will celebrate its 50th anniversary next January. These conferences are included in the list of the Australian Council of Professors and Heads of Information Systems (2013). Furthermore, ICIS is rated as a top tier conference in the University of Alberta Computer Science Conference Rankings (University of Alberta 2011), as an A* conference in the Computer Science Conference Rank (CORE) (Computing Research and Education Association of Australasia 2014) as well as an A outlet in JourQual III, a rating which is conducted by German speaking Business professors (Verband der Hochschullehrer für Betriebswirtschaft 2016). Thus, these conferences have a good reputation and there are incentives to attend these generic conferences in order to achieve a higher level of visibility. But to which extent do these conferences cover the entire range of information systems research?

ICIS, for instance, created unconscious momentum to exclude essential topics within the IS community which did not have a behavioral background before 2014. It took considerable efforts and support by the colleagues in the organizing and steering committees to bring back core topics like Information Systems Design, Business Process Management, Decision Analytics and Support, Enterprise Systems – just to name a few. As a result, temporarily excluded subject communities were re-animated, yielding a significant increase of submissions compared to previous ICIS conferences. Moreover, this approach especially stimulated submissions from Europe. For the first time ever, Europe, the Middle-East, and Africa (AIS region 2) were able to generate more acceptance than the Americas (AIS region 1, see Fig. 1). The combination of quality
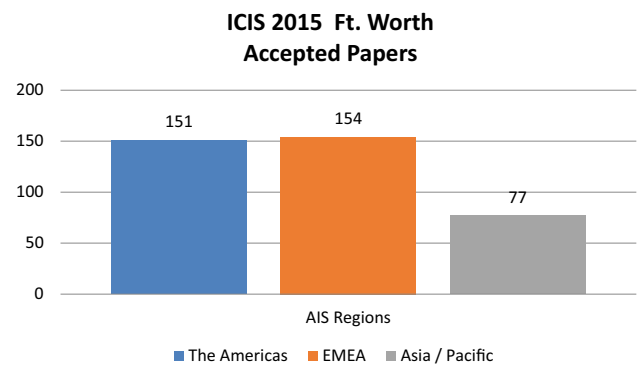

ICIS 2015 Ft. Worth Accepted Papers

Fig. 1 Papers accepted to ICIS 2015 by world regions

Table 1 Papers accepted to ICIS 2015 by countries

Rank	Country	Accept	Reject	Total
	Total	382	817	1.199
1	United States	129	261	390
2	Germany	91	162	253
3	Australia	24	60	84
4	Canada	20	18	38
5	Singapore	16	32	48
6	Switzerland	15	18	33
7	Hong Kong	13	21	34
8	Finland	11	18	29
9	Republic of Korea	10	24	34
10	United Kingdom	9	22	31
11	Denmark	6	14	20
13	France	4	12	16
14	Netherlands	4	13	17
15	Liechtenstein	3	0	3
16	Sweden	3	13	16
18	Austria	2	4	6

signals, high visibility, and subject pluralism triggered contributions from Europe in an unprecedented manner (see Table 1).

Conference submissions may be "distilled" into high quality papers if the submission quality and quantity is above average and if the quality of the review process is sustainable. Due to the increase of subject diversity, there were enough submissions to prune out low quality papers. But the quality of the review process is not yet there where it should be for a top tier conference – a fact that is likely to pertain for most large conferences. First, it is hard to recruit the number of track chairs, associate editors, and reviewers required to provide a high quality potential of the review base. This is a serious challenge since these events take place every year and they are likely to overstrain the resources of a community. Second, the quality of the reviews has shown some variance. While the majority of

reviews in top conferences are thoroughly written, it is one of the greatest challenges for the organizing committee to deal with low-content reviews as well as to identify social dependencies within the review teams. If an AE appoints two of his/her Ph.D. students as reviewers, this provides another challenge. As a matter of fact, a huge number of reviews need to be solicited for a conference in a short period of time. In contrast, journals largely operate without deadlines or strict page limits, allowing for a thorough review cycle and involving the set of editors and reviewers who know the topic of a paper best. As a consequence, this requires longer reviewing times, but it is essential to "distill" a significant research contribution that goes beyond the state-of-the-art.

Our second question addresses the challenge how conference papers can be forwarded more effectively to scholarly journals in order to further develop a theoretical or technological contribution. If major conferences, such as ICIS, are becoming more pluralistic, this calls for journals that pursue a similar philosophy. Our perception is that European IS scholars have been attracted by the extended topics at ICIS in particular.

Many conference papers have been desk rejected by journals since they lack ingenuity or they have already been published in conference proceedings. Other journals, including BISE, required that journal submissions must differ by length and depth from previous conference papers. Some conferences have adapted their formats to avoid the inhibition of submitting conference contributions to journals. For instance, the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management (AOM) reviews, selects, presents, and discusses lengthy and rich papers, but does not publish them in order to leave the journal road unblocked. The Association for Information Systems (AIS) has recently announced a new policy for publishing conference papers in journals. It applies to the journals and conferences that AIS governs, so AIS conference papers can be published in any journal and AIS journals cannot reject papers solely because they were published at an AIS conference. AIS believes that the incongruent linkage between conferences and journals is threatening the future of its conferences. AIS hopes that affiliated journals (those that get special rebates due to an AIS membership) and journals published by other organizations will follow its policy in order to better facilitate the linkage between conferences and journals. In other words, AIS attempts to improve the integration of the publication of conference and journal papers.

We have positioned BISE as a general-interest journal in the broad field of information systems. It aims at facilitating high quality research papers for our research community and making them accessible for other subject communities and academics in other fields. In order to achieve high quality, we are convinced of the value of authors having the opportunity to present their work in seminars, workshops, or conferences. For this reason, we would like to further encourage scholars from different subject-communities to submit their conference papers to BISE, no matter if the conference format was specialized or generic – as long as the submission respects copyrights of the respective conference proceedings. We have adapted our author guidelines to reflect this recent discussion. We want to emphasize, however, that a journal paper should extend the contribution of a prior conference paper. This can be achieved, for instance, by taking into account suggestions from the reviewers of a conference that could not be addressed in the short time frame of the conference revision cycle. Thus, a journal submission should go beyond a conference paper. Although a conference paper is rarely published without changes in a scholarly journal, it is also expected to be more elaborate than the original conference paper. More elaborate means that the conceptualizing/theorizing, artifact/model development and testing/analyzing as well as the literature feedback should be enhanced.

We are confident that the commitment and background of our reviewers has the potential to better frame and carveout the ingenuity and novelty of the submissions by our community members. We are also convinced that the feedback from workshop or conference reviews and presentations helps to prepare a better input quality for papers submitted to our journal. Thus, we highly welcome conference papers that were accepted at conferences. The increasing fit with and the success of European scholars in international flagship conferences calls for this kind of policy change.

References

Australian Council of Professors and Heads of Information Systems (2013) Recommended IS conferences. http://www.acphis.org.au/index.php/is-conference-ranking. Accessed 30 April 2016

Computing Research and Education Association of Australasia (2014) Computer science conference rank. http://lipn.univ-paris13.fr/~bennani/CSRank.html. Accessed 30 April 2016

Halpern JY, Parkes DC (2011) Journals for certification, conferences for rapid dissemination. Commun ACM 54(8):36–38

University of Alberta (2011) Computer science conference rankings. https://webdocs.cs.ualberta.ca/~zaiane/htmldocs/ConfRanking.html. Accessed 30 April 2016

Verband der Hochschullehrer für Betriebswirtschaft (2016) VHB-JOURQUAL3 – Teilrating Wirtschaftsinformatik. http://vhbonline.org/service/jourqual/vhb-jourqual-3/teilrating-wi. Accessed 30 April 2016