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Giorgio Di Natale, C. Bolchini

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# Conference Reports

## Holding Conferences Online Due to COVID-19: The DATE Experience

**Giorgio di Natale**

Univ. Grenoble Alpes, CNRS, Grenoble INP, TIMA

**Cristiana Bolchini**

Politecnico di Milano

■ **THE DESIGN, AUTOMATION,** and Test in Europe (DATE) Conference and Exhibition is an annual event, scheduled in 2020 to be held March 9–13, 2020, at the Alpexpo Congress Centre in Grenoble. Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, the conference took place in a virtual environment, in April and May 2020.

DATE is the main European event bringing together designers and design automation users, researchers, and vendors as well as specialists in hardware and software design, test, and manufacturing of electronic circuits and systems, covering ICs/SoCs, reconfigurable hardware and embedded systems, and embedded software.

After the submission deadline, 748 submissions were sent for review, to a Technical Program Committee comprising 328 members from all around the globe. A large share of the articles (39%) came from authors in Europe, 27% of submissions from the Americas, 33% from Asia, and 1% from the rest of the world. Submissions involved more than 2,400 authors from 45 different countries, a distribution that clearly demonstrates DATE's international character, global reach, and impact.

The review process selected 194 articles (26%) for regular presentation and 82 additional ones (cumulatively 37%, including all articles) for interactive presentation, converted to short

presentations to fit the peculiar format of the event, leading to a final program consisting of 55 technical sessions.

DATE 2020 featured an exciting program full of innovative research presentations, inspiring keynote talks, trending executive and special sessions, as well as the PhD Forum, University Booth, Friday Workshops, and the Exhibition Theater program. At that time, more than 1,300 participants had already registered to attend the event.

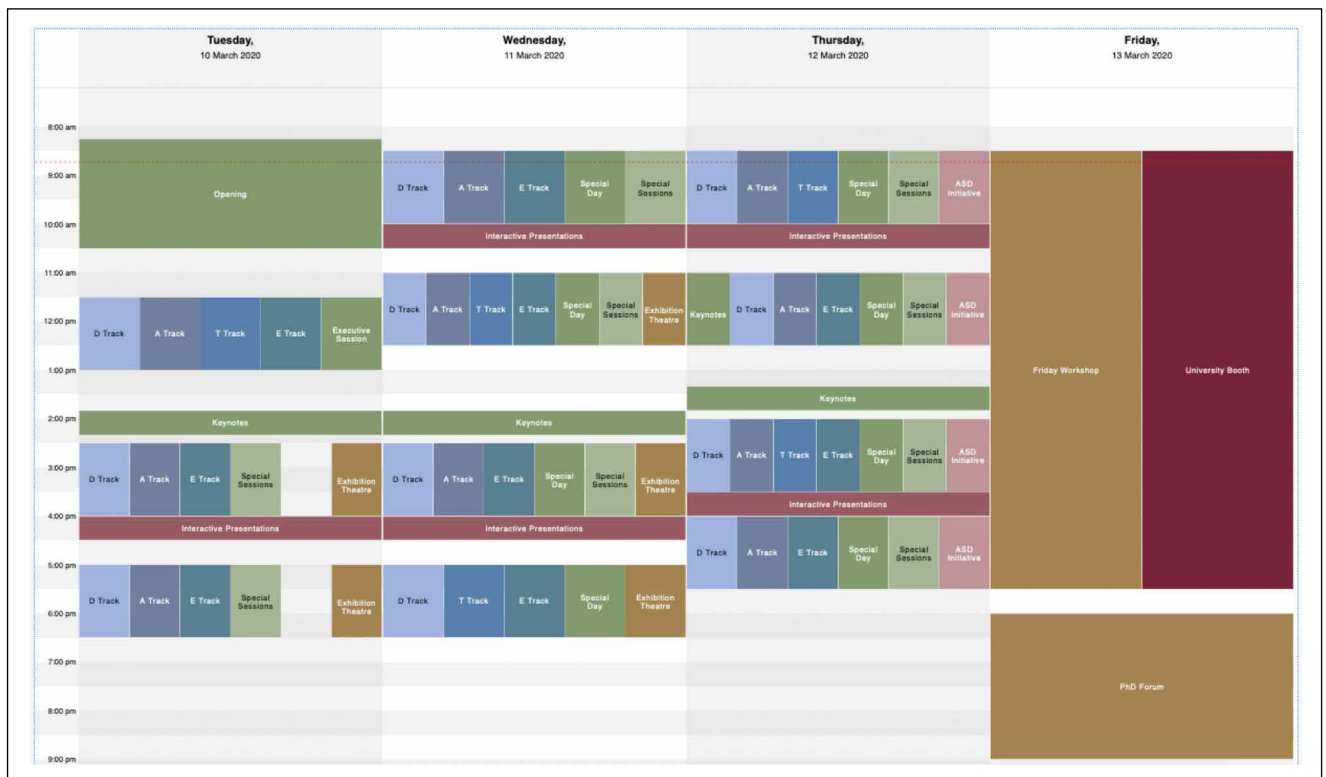
Eventually, a few days before the conference opening, the event was moved to a virtual platform because of the COVID-19 outbreak, to preserve the safety of all attendees. DATE 2020 was among the first conferences to adopt this change of format, porting the program as a whole, also considering the size of the event that typically gathers more than 1,000 participants. A recorded video presentation has been prepared by all authors, allowing both presenters to introduce the recent outcomes of their work, and virtual attendees to appreciate the valuable experience of being guided through it.

On April 21, the virtual event opened, hosting the complete program (except for the Monday tutorials and a few of the Exhibition Theater presentations, as shown in Figure 1) consisting of more than 450 presentations, allowing participants to benefit from the premier European conference on design, design automation, and test.

The opening session included the welcome addresses by the general chair and the program chair, the presentation of the awards, and the keynote talk given by Luca Benini (chair of digital

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**Figure 1. DATE 2020 program on the virtual platform.**

circuits and systems at ETH Zürich and a professor at the University of Bologna) on the topic “Open Parallel Ultra-Low Power Platforms for Extreme Edge Artificial Intelligence (AI).” The recorded video of all these presentations was viewed more than 1,000 times.

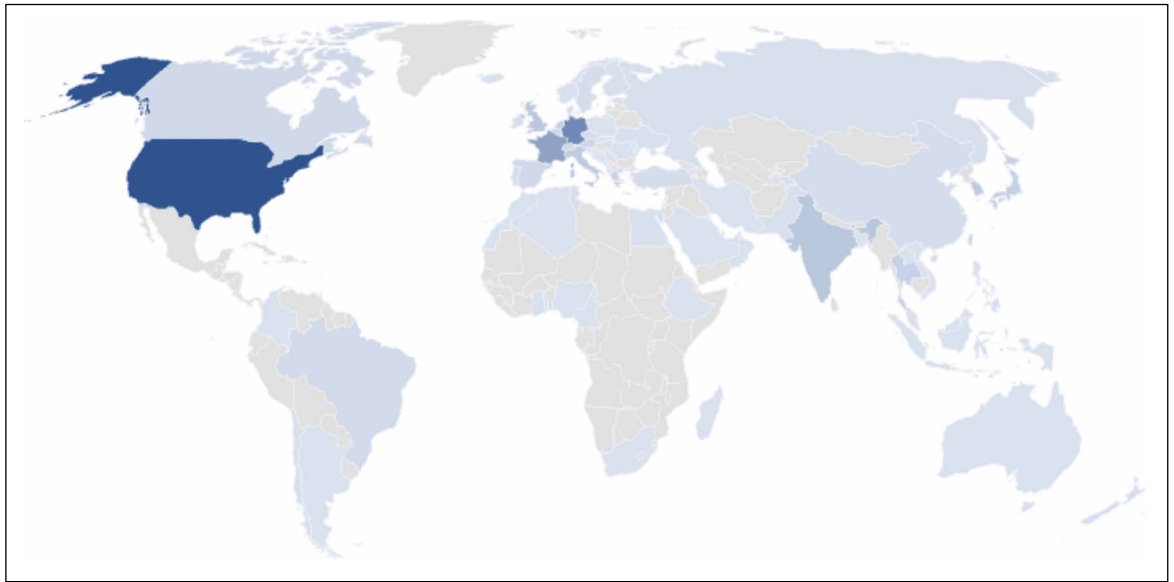
Two special days focused on “Embedded Artificial Intelligence” and “Silicon Photonics.” The sessions organized on these two hot topics covered new trends in cognitive algorithms, hardware architectures, software designs, emerging device technologies for AI, and on data communication via photonics for both data center/high-performance computing and optical networks on chip applications.

Traditional DATE activities also include the PhD Forum and the University Booth, where university students and faculty can meet industrial representatives and showcase their research and outcomes. The PhD Forum, supported by EDAA, ACM SIGDA, and IEEE CEDA, gathered the work of 32 PhD students or recent graduates, who prepared a poster and/or a presentation introducing their research. Forty-two virtual booths populated the University

Booth, proposing their contributions with posters, handouts, and short presentations.

On the last day of the conference, the Friday Workshop program usually takes place. In the virtual event, six workshops engaged focused audience with scientific presentations and invited talks, covering the areas of autonomous systems design, optical/photonic interconnects, computation-in-memory, open-source design automation, stochastic computing for neuromorphic architectures, and hardware security.

All contributions were video recorded and made available through the platform: DATE being a global event, it would have been difficult to have live talks scheduled at a suitable time of the day. Message boards were provided to allow a direct Q&A interaction session between authors and participants, avoiding time-zone differences. On the positive side, the format enabled all participants to virtually attend more talks, without the problem of overlapping sessions. With the exception of the Monday tutorials and luncheon talks, all traditional activities took place in the virtual platform, offering the opportunity to finalize one year of work and effort by the



**Figure 2. Map of DATE 2020 viewers.**

entire DATE community: submitters, authors, presenters, and participants. The virtual event ran from April 21 to May 30, and during the first three weeks virtual participants and viewers were from 83 different countries (see Figure 2 for viewers' geographical distribution).

**WE HAVE ALL** missed the unique atmosphere and networking aspect of DATE; for these invaluable ele-

ments, we mark our calendars for DATE 2021, to be held on February 1–5, 2021, in Grenoble. See <http://www.date-conference.com> for more details. ■

■ Direct questions and comments about this paper to Cristiana Bolchini, Politecnico di Milano, 20133 Milano, Italy; [cristiana.bolchini@polimi.it](mailto:cristiana.bolchini@polimi.it).