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### EDITORIAL

## In Memory of Vladimir B. Bajic (1952–2019)

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Professor Vladimir B. Bajic, a world-renowned pioneer in bioinformatics and associate editor-in-chief of *Genomics Proteomics & Bioinformatics* (GPB) since 2015, passed away on 31 October 2019 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Prof. Bajic joined the editorial board of GPB in 2012 and had been devoting his precious time and efforts to handling and reviewing manuscripts and providing many valuable instructions and suggestions in improving journal quality and readership as well. Here, we, former colleagues and friends at the GPB Editorial Board, Beijing Institute of Genomics, Chinese Academy of Sciences (BIG, CAS), Bioinformatics Institute A\*STAR, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), and in the wider scientific community, wish to pay our highest tribute to Prof. Bajic and recognize his achievements as scientist, mentor, teacher, and leading science administrator.

Prof. Bajic was born on 24 February, 1952. He was educated in the field of electrical engineering sciences, obtained his Master's degree from the University of Belgrade, Serbia, and later his Ph.D. doctoral degree from the University of Zagreb, Croatia in 1989. He, right after, served as Professor and Director of Centre for Engineering Research and Department of Electronic Engineering, Technikon Natal, Durban, South Africa. Since 2001, he had worked in different industrial and academic institutions, such as serving as the Head of the Knowledge Extraction Laboratory of the Institute for Informatics Research (I2R) in Singapore, and Professor of Bioinformatics, Acting and Deputy Director of the South African National Bioinformatics Institute (SANBI) at the University of the Western Cape, Cape Town in South Africa. In 2009, Prof. Bajic was appointed to be the founding Director and Professor of Computational Bioscience Research Center (CBRC) at KAUST and had been heavily involved in the

establishment and development of CBRC (<https://cb.kaust.edu.sa/Pages/Bajic.aspx>).

Prof. Bajic received a number of professional awards and served as important roles nationally and internationally. He was an elected member of the National Academy of Nonlinear Sciences in Russia, registered Professional Engineer in South Africa, and holder of the first South African Research Chair in Bioinformatics and Human Health. He served as a member of Scientific Advisory Board of the National Genomics Data Center (formerly BIG Data Center) in BIG. He also participated as a founding member in the Global Biodiversity & Health Big Data Alliance to promote data sharing at the global scale. Prof. Bajic served on the editorial boards of several international journals and was invited as RIKEN scientist and a core member of the Functional Annotation of the Mammalian Genome (FANTOM) consortium. He was an elected role model of I2R in 2002, and has been awarded the first Department of Science and Technology/National Research Foundation (DST/NRF) South African Research Chair (Tier 1) in Bioinformatics and Human Health in 2007.

Prof. Bajic's hopping between organizations and countries of residence was not by personal choice although we remember him as open to new experiences, being an adventurous and a very curious personality. Yugoslavia, his home country, disintegrated in a civil war in the early 1990's, right after he completed his education. Post-socialist Eastern Europe as a whole was in a painful societal transition towards a market economy accompanied with a sharp decline of previously productive, state-funded scientific institutions. He did not hesitate to grab opportunities in countries that wanted to become newly emerging major players in science and technology development, such as South Africa, Singapore, and Saudi Arabia.

He engaged pragmatically, repeatedly created new scientific infrastructure and teaching programs, invented new science funding lines by convincing local authorities and, thus, successfully contributed both to the advance of his host countries and to the world's scientific progress.

Prof. Bajic is a colossal figure in the field with a rare mix of intelligence, diligence, and kindness. He had broad interests in bioinformatics-related topics and his passion was in facilitating biomedical discoveries by using computational systems, such as data- and text-mining, artificial intelligence, and machine learning for the discovery of mechanisms of gene expression regulation, drug repositioning, biomarker screening, and disease diagnostics. Across various related fields, he had an extensive network of collaborators around the globe and authored more than 400 research publications, edited book chapters, more than 100 software products, invention disclosures, and patents. His work in modeling and artificial intelligence has resulted in several promoter recognition tools and knowledge discovery platforms, and some of them were commercialized. Significantly, he had supported a large number of young colleagues and scientists and over 50 Master's and doctoral students had graduated under his direct supervision. While fighting with lymphatic cancer in 2019, he still worked actively with his students, conducted scientific discussions with his colleagues, and handled manuscripts for GPB. His spirit and legacy will be respected and carried on by his colleagues and friends, and certainly the next generation of bioinformaticians and computational biologists.

In his whole life, valuable contributions Prof. Bajic made to multiple institutions, journals, organizations, and countries worldwide will be never erased from our memories. May Prof. Bajic rest in peace.