Impact Award Winner

I would like to thank TCDE and the committee for this great honor, and for an amazing event that we all experienced in Paris!

Very few things in life are entirely the work of just one person and this is no exception, so I must also pay tribute to the enormous contributions made by my students and colleagues without which, none of this would have been possible and I certainly wouldn't have gotten this award.

Awards like these tell us a lot about our pastime and the drive that has made this possible. And this drive has been possible because I was always surrounded by enthusiastic and inspiring people: my professors, my students and my colleagues. In fact, I have had great teachers and mentors throughout my whole career - undergrad, grad, postdoc, faculty - which is my inspiration for trying to be a good teacher and mentor myself. There are 3 pioneers that greatly influenced my career, Christos Papadimitriou in 1981 was the person to suggest that I should do a PhD in Databases, Phil Bersntein who was the first to mentor me at Harvard, and Mike Stonebraker for guiding me through a PhD and getting a real view of real DBMS group.

Back in the early 90s and after 9 years in the US, I felt that I had to go and give back to my home country, Greece, and have an impact on forming a data management community there. I am very happy to reflect now on the 20 years I devoted to this, giving me great pleasure, not only to see so many other colleagues came back to Greece as well, but also that we have collectively managed to set up and maintain a high caliber community.

In the last 6 years I live in Melbourne; well not so different as Melbourne is the third largest Greek city in the world after Athens and Thessaloniki! Leading a Data Science institute there presents a great challenge. I am trying to run an interdisciplinary unit working on research opportunities with astrophysicists to social scientists and hospitals to textile manufacturers. To be honest, what I enjoy most, apart from seeing how we can help all these communities, is how much I learn from processes and methodologies they use and thinking how these can influence data engineering. And I feel more and more that we nowadays play a much more important role than in the past.

Data is becoming the glue between disciplines and we have a responsibility in making interdisciplinary efforts work; as data management community we were always open to talk to other disciplines, as everybody presents us with interesting challenges. In that sense, if we gain their trust we can also help throw bridges among them. A personal experience: talking to astrophysicists and cancer researchers I could see the commonalities on image analysis research including data analysis and GPU based algorithms. Bringing them together to the table created a great interdisciplinary team and we look forward to a very successful collaboration. Data-driven solutions are in the core of problem solving nowadays and all sectors from anthropology to autonomous systems are looking towards data intelligence as the new paradigm for scientific discovery and innovation. There is a bright future for our field and we should be happy and feel the great responsibility to make this a successful future!

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