Obituary

In Memoriam: Sherif Sakr

Sherif Sakr was a rising star in the constellation of database researchers. After obtaining a BSc and MSc degrees in Computer Science from the Faculty of Computers and Information at Cairo University in 2001 and 2003, respectively, he joined the ranks of the Computer and Information Science of Konstanz University, where he obtained a doctorate in 2007 for his research on XQuery Processing on top of relational databases. He then joined NICTA Research Centre (now CSIRO Data61 Lab) and University of New South Wales, where he developed a research agenda in the field of graph indexing and querying.

Following these appointments, he joined the ranks of the Department of Health Informatics at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU-HS), Saudi Arabia, where he pursued various applications of graph processing and big data technologies in the medical field. Along the way, he held visiting researcher and scholar appointments at Microsoft Research, Redmond, USA (2011), Nokia Bell Labs, Ireland – Formerly Alcatel-Lucent Bell Labs (2012), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany (2015), University of Zurich, Switzerland (2016), and Technical University of Dresden, Germany (2016). This infatigable research journey led him to write the *Handbook of Big Data Technologies* (2017) and later the *Encyclopedia of Big Data Technologies* (2019), which will remain as one of his most notable legacies to the field of database research.

In 2018, Sherif joined University of Tartu's Institute of Computer Science in 2018 funded by a Top Researcher grant from the Estonian Research Council. During his two-years tenure, he created and led a Data Systems Research Group, which he grew from 1 to 16 researchers and research students in less than 24 months. During this time, he developed and spread his vision. He imagined a highly scalable engine for distributed event processing. His efforts immediately produced notable results: at CAiSE 2019 his work on stream analytics earned a Best Paper Award. Sherif was a tireless researcher. In fact, he started in parallel a research stream on explainable machine learning. At ADBIS 2019, he presented a hybrid local-global approach for generating explanations from black-box machine learning models.

Sherif Sakr will be remembered for generously giving his time to his community. During his career, Prof. Sakr was associate editor of the *Cluster Computing* journal and *Transactions on Large-Scale Data and Knowledge-Centered Systems* (TLDKS). He served as an editorial board member and guest editor for several reputable top-ranked scientific journals. He toured the world as a distinguished speaker of both the ACM and the IEEE Computer Society. Prof. Sakr published more than 150 refereed research

publications in international journals and conferences. He was also author of six books, including *Big Data 2.0 Processing Systems* (2016). His research received more than 4,000 citations[1]. In 2019, he received the Best Arab Scholar Award from the Abdul Hammed Shoman Foundation.

Above and beyond all of the above, Sherif Sakr was a good person. The kind of person one would like to meet both personally and professionally. He cared that everyone felt comfortable and approached life with enthusiasm. He forged a group upon his values: hard work, intellectual honesty, and mutual support. His colleagues will remember Sherif as a passionate and visionary scientist, and someone who had time for everyone, devoting much time to ensuring that his students were aiming high and pushing them to maximize their potential.

Sherif Sakr was due to organize the ADBIS conference in Tartu in 2021. Unfortunately, he passed away during the night on March 24, 2020. His team will take over his mission to host ADBIS 2021.

June 2020   Marlon Dumas
                                                          Riccardo Tommasini

---

[1] cf. Google Scholar 2020.