

Laudatio for Faris Nizamic, PhD

Dear Faris,

I will start from the beginning, since the time when you had joined our group, super-excited, very motivated, being ready to face any challenges on your way! You have started with the topic on testing for service-oriented applications; and it well fit with one of the group research directions back then and with your background expertise. You had a very clear and strong vision on how virtualization techniques will change the way we deal with testing of distributed applications. Right from the first year, to collect information, but also to spread your initial ideas to the outer world, you visited many conferences and events. I think only during that first year you gave more presentations on those events than some scientists do not deliver through their whole career. And it was successful, as, your ideas, for example, let you largely expand your network, and, as a side effect of it, you were later invited for a successful internship in the ING bank. Who knows, probably a famous saying from the ING chief architect that he did at the DockerCon conference that “ING is now rather an IT company and we do as good as our IT does” was influenced by your work.

Fortunately for us, testing is probably not what you will be known about, as during your work you found something that made you even more excited: sustainability. You took an initiative and (together with your colleague Tuan), applied for an internal university grant: GreenMind Award promising to turn the Bernoulliborg building where your office is located into a more efficient building. And you have not only promised that, but also that the awarded grant should be seen as loan rather than a grant and that you will not only make it more energy-efficient, but you will be able to pay back the grant by the achieved savings. We were all very surprised, of course positively, how fast you were able to become an expert in the field. And, while preparing for this small speech, I finally discovered why. When I looked into you original email that you send to us asking for an opportunity for a PhD, you have explicitly mentioned that you are very much excited about two particular ongoing EU projects within our group: Smart Homes for All and GreenerBuildings. So, it looks like, it was all planned from the beginning, and you knew that you will end up doing home and office automation. Before I continue, I would like to also mention that this is not the first time when you take every opportunity to apply your ideas and to collaborate. For example, on one of the conferences, you met with another PhD student from University of Bamberg in Germany, and that quickly established collaboration resulted in a publication.

However, turning the existing big office building into an ICT-driven was not an easy task. In this kind of production-oriented project is somewhat delicate. I call it “production” as any things you do in the building would influence comfort and productivity of hundreds of people, most of which have no incentive in sitting in cold rooms without light with a turned off computer due to some software bug. You cannot enforce certain things – but in the same time your goal was to ensure scientific novelty and quality, as you have to prove that your PhD title is well deserved. The fact that you are here today proves that that path was successful, but I have to also admit it was not an easy one for you. The main goal of the software industry is a product that will allow earning profit and not a successful PhD. And I admire you organizational and leadership skills when you formed a lab where many bachelor and master students could have come and learn, but also to contribute back to the success of the project. You have also shown an evidence of

accepting a part of the Dutch culture I am not very fond of: continuous meetings. But I admit that managing all of the involved people would have not been possible without the well-organized process that you have established in the project.

When I was writing this speech, I started actually wondering: what is a good PhD? How can you define it? What makes the difference between special and ordinary? How can you compare a theoretical thesis with full of theorems and the one that is largely influenced by the case study? One may measure this by the number of publications, another one by the citation index, someone else comes with a number of co-authors emphasizing the independence and ability to build scientific network of the PhD candidate. We may also consider the amount of pages in the thesis, or amount of coffee cups drunk during the joint discussions. Each of this parameter has a clear correlation with the success, but what is the most important? What measure is the right one?

What I was thinking of this, I recalled a restaurant business. Very similar, right? Very subjective, and it is next to impossible to define it right. How can you measure a small restaurant in a distant village with dishes from local products with a fancy restaurant in the center of Paris or New York? And, apparently, preparing food is not that difficult, we all prepare it at home, and in most cases we enjoy it. The industry consists of millions of people preparing food, and yet, some get those Michelin stars and some don't. What the difference? And the difference is that the restaurant get is Michelin star is not for the amount of visitors, price on the menu or the like. It gets it for an innovative visionary aspect, by introducing a new paradigm, a style, something that influences other restaurants to re-think their way and their place.

Following this idea, it is very easy to separate a good strong scientist from an excellent one. It is not a number of publications or something measurable, it is that new vision, a new eye-opener, a new and novel approach, new open horizons. You rarely see that in a PhD level work, as it is largely influenced by supervisors, community you work in, etc. So, having these criteria, I consider your work worthy of awarding a Michelin star – for innovative insight on how applied computer science should look like. Computer scientists usually care about performance, correctness, even usability, but rarely about financial matters and economic incentives – these are the things left for the industry. I cannot say I like this change, but I also see that in some domains this is probably inevitable. You, with your approach, brought a very interesting multidisciplinary vision on how applied computer science may look like in the following years. And this vision, this implicit meta-message of your thesis, even if I am not very happy about it myself, is something worth a special Michelin star. But I have to warn you: if I continue the metaphor, Michelin stars also demand consistency over years: that is, you have to show your quality and stick to your vision for the forthcoming years!

Unfortunately, your last 4 years were not only joy and fun working on interesting problems. Your father passed away and, unfortunately, he is not able to share this moment with you. However, and that I know for sure, he is now observing you from up there and he is very, very proud of you. What makes it even more amazing of you is that you have never used it as an excuse to work less or to miss a deadline or to fail your promise. I have seen many times how hard it was for you to keep it inside, but you have never asked for any special treatment because of that. I very much admire this attitude and the strong character that allowed you to keep up going.

Clearly, without being motivated, hard-working, creative, and fully dedicated to your work, such results would have not been possible. However, if I ever be asked what is your main distinctive skill is, I would emphasize your ability to move forward no matter what. When the hurdle is set too high, you never give up; you always see it as a challenge and not as an obstacle.

It was a pleasure to be your supervisor all these years, but I would also like to emphasize the role of Prof. Marco Aiello, without whom your supervision would have been incomplete and short-sighted. I would also like to emphasize the importance and the role of Rix Groenboom as one of your supervisors who helped you starting your PhD trajectory. Unfortunately, when you started moving towards energy-aware buildings (something that Rix also helped you with his pioneering energy smart meter project), the connection with Rix has somewhat weakened. Nevertheless, the project I mentioned – collecting and measuring the energy from smart meters from Rix not only inspired you and formed a foundation for your work, but also crystallized the importance of taking into account economic feasibility aspects for the overall success in applied science fields.

All three of us wish you success in your future career, being it a career of an entrepreneur, scientist, top-level software expert, or anything else you now consider for yourself. I am happy that I am given a chance to be the first to congratulate you with obtaining a PhD title! Congratulations!

Prof. Alexander Lazovik (daily supervisor)

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