

Dear,

After a master in bioscience engineering at KU Leuven and two research positions at Janssen Pharmaceuticals (as data manager for clinical trials, and as bioinformatician in Pharmacogenomics), I started my academic career through PhD research at Wageningen University (Netherlands), where I contributed to unravelling and sequencing of the **chicken genome**. Consequently, I went to the Roslin Institute in Scotland to perform similar research within the **Cattle Genome Sequencing Consortium**. In 2005 I joined the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute near Cambridge, UK, to work on the **1,000 Genome Project** and exome sequencing. Throughout these positions, much of my focus was on **data handling and transformation, as well as on data standards and databases** (both relational and NoSQL).

More and more, it became clear to me that the bigger problem is not necessarily to find the "right" (statistical) answer to a given question but to identify the interesting questions in the first place. This sparked my interest in **data visualisation and visual analytics**, where the aim is to augment the human rather than replace them; **using visualisation as a "tool for thought"**.

When an assistant professorship became available at KU Leuven in Belgium, I therefore decided to switch my focus from genomics to data visualisation. I started my **Visual Data Analysis Lab** (vda-lab.github.io) at the Electrical Engineering Department of the Faculty of Engineering. Over the years a gradual shift was made to include **topological data analysis** into my visual analytics approach, where we try to identify the underlying "shape" of complex and high-dimensional data. The main aim here is to put data into context; it can be described as local data structure in its global context, or a combination of dimensionality reduction and data clustering. The group I lead has won several **awards** in data visualisation and visual analytics, most recently in October 2022 on the topic of protein modifications.

In 2018 I was approached by Hasselt University to **start up the new Data Science Institute (DSI; www.uhasselt.be/dsi) and act as its first Director**. As a result, I left KU Leuven in January 2019 to start this new appointment (as full professor) while still keeping a small - still ongoing - teaching responsibility in Leuven on data visualisation and data management. In this position, I was involved in establishing data science as a strong field within Hasselt University and the region. The Institute played a very important role in COVID-related research and recommendations to the government.

When my tenure as director of the institute ended in January 2022, I joined the **CRO Amador Bioscience** with the specific aims to champion visual analytics across the organisation as well as **develop and set up a data governance plan**. This project has now finished. As a result, I am currently looking for new opportunities in this field.

Prof Jan Aerts