

Obituary

Dr. Gian Nicola Babini (1944–2012)



Gian Nicola Babini was born in Faenza, Italy on April 24, 1944. He was educated at the University of Bologna, where he attained a degree (cum laude) in Industrial Chemistry. Dr. Babini joined CNR (The National Research Council of Italy) in 1975 as a researcher before being appointed Director of ISTEC-CNR (Institute of Science and Technology for Ceramics) in 1985 and retired from CNR in 2008. After retirement he was President of several organisations and companies involved in the advancement of high technology ceramics and the certification of products and materials.

Nicola was known as an enthusiastic promoter of the science and technology of new materials. He contributed significantly to the technological development of his field in Italy as well as in Europe and other overseas countries. From a scientific point of view, his area of expertise was primarily advanced ceramics: materials and processing for structural applications.

From the very beginning of his career at ISTEC-CNR, Dr. Babini combined his experimental activities with managing and promoting technologies, fostering cooperation, partnerships, new research and technology transfer structures, and integrating multidisciplinary partners for the success of R&D initiatives. At the same time, he was highly active as a teacher and trainer of young scientists, being aware of the importance of developing skills and motivation in young minds.

Owing to his strong awareness of the role of technology transfer in capitalising on laboratory results, Dr. Babini always pursued initiatives for:

- the diffusion and dissemination of knowledge towards the production sector and linking research contracts with the commercial sector,
- supporting the start-up and spin-off of new companies,
- the assembly of consortia for the organization of innovation projects at any level: regional, national and European.

To this end, he coordinated and promoted two important initiatives at local level: firstly, the constitution of an Agency for Ceramics (a public consortium for Technology Transfer) and, secondly, the design of a Science Park on Ceramics in agreement with industrialist associations and local authorities.

Under the direction of Dr. Babini, from 1985 to 2008 ISTEC-CNR underwent significant development as personnel increased to over 60 staff and the institute occupied two sites: the main one in Faenza and a separate unit in Torino. His enormous contribution included taking care of new buildings and laboratories and opening new fields of research. Besides traditional ceramics and structural ceramics, the new sectors of biomaterials, electroceramics and cultural heritage attracted research programmes in agreement with European policy guidelines and R&D initiatives at a national level.

Dr. Babini served on a number of committees within local, national and international bodies and initiatives (conferences and joint programmes). In particular, he was President of the Italian Ceramic Society (1994–2000) and, for two terms, President of the European Ceramic Society (1993–1995 and 2001–2005). He organized the Fourth European Ceramic Society Conference, held in Riccione in 1995. Under his Presidency, the European Ceramic Society enlarged its membership to 25 countries. Dr. Babini greatly enhanced the society's organization and activities, notably in developing relationships inside Europe and collaborations with the ceramic societies of other countries, such as the USA, Japan and China.

During the period 2006–2008 he was appointed President of the International Ceramic Federation through which he significantly contributed towards the worldwide international Ceramic community. In 2008, as President of the International Congress

on Ceramics, he organized the ICC2 Congress: the Global Roadmap for Ceramics, held in Verona.

Dr. Babini always pursued initiatives for international collaboration, a major result of which was the constitution of the Research Institute for Nanoscience (RIN): a joint institute between ISTECH and Kyoto Institute of Technology. Other initiatives included bilateral development programmes with institutions in the USA, Japan, China, Brazil, Vietnam and Indonesia, to mention but a few.

In spite of the importance of the roles he fulfilled during his life and the senior titles he held, Dr. Babini maintained his enthusiasm for communicating with young

researchers and an ability to transfer to them a love for knowledge as well as the energy for creating new ambits where Materials Science could impact on any aspect of social progress.

Certainly it can be said that his mark will remain forever engraved on the organisations, institutions and collaborations he built and all the people who had the privilege of meeting him. His colleagues at ISTECH shall never forget him and his legacy will have a lasting impact on the new generation of researchers entering ceramic science.

Colleagues of Dr. Babini from ISTECH-CNR

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