

traseR: TRait-Associated SNP EnRichment analyses

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Abstract

This vignette introduces the use of traseR (TRait-Associated SNPEnRichment analyses, which is designed to provide quantitative assessment whether a selected genomic interval(s) is likely to be functionally connected with certain traits or diseases. traseR consists of several modules, all written in R, to perform hypothesis testing, exploration and visualization of trait-associated SNPs(taSNPs). It also assembles the up-to-date taSNPs from dbGaP and NHGRI, SNPs from 1000 Genome Project CEU population with linkage disequilibrium greater than 0.8 within 100 kb of taSNPs, and all SNPs of CEU population from 1000 Genome project into its built-in database, which could be directly loaded when performing analyses.

1 Introduction

Genome-wide association study (GWAS) have successfully identified many sequence variants that are significantly associated with common diseases and traits. Tens of thousands of such trait-associated SNPs have already been cataloged which we believe are great resources for genomic research. However, no tools existing utilizes those resources in a comprehensive and convenient way. In this study, we show the collection of taSNPs can be exploited to indicate whether a query genomic interval(s) is likely to be functionally connected with certain traits or diseases. A R Bioconductor package named traseR has been developed to carry out such analyses.

2 Data collection

One great feature of traseR is the built-in database that collects various public SNP resources. Common public SNP databases include Association Result Browser and 1000 Genome Project. We briefly introduce the procedures to process those public available SNP resources

2.1 Obtain taSNPs

Association Results Browser (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/projects/gapplusprev/sgap_plus.htm) combines identified taSNPs from dbGaP and NHGRI, which together provide 44,078 SNP-trait associations, 48,936 SNP-trait class associations, 30,553 unique taSNPs, 573 unique traits and 33 unique trait classes. This resource has been built into GRanges object `taSNP` and could be loaded into R console by typing `data(taSNP)`.

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traseR need to specify the collection of trait-associated SNPs in particular format before we carry out enrichment analyses. The format starts with the columns,

1. Trait: Description of disease/trait examined in the study
2. Trait_Class: Trait class which is formed based on the phenotype tree. Close traits are grouped together to form one class.
3. SNP_ID: SNP rs number
4. p.value: GWAS reported p-values
5. seqnames: Chromosome number associated with rs number
6. ranges: Chromosomal position, in base pairs, associated with rs number
7. Context: SNP functional class
8. GENE_NAME: Genes reported to be associated with SNPs
9. GENE_START: Chromosome start position of genes
10. GENE_END: Chromosome end position of genes
11. GENE_STRAND: Chromosome strand associated with SNPs

Currently, the traseR package automatically synchronize trait-associated SNPs from Association Results Browser, which collects up-to-date GWAS results from dbGaP NHGRI GWAS catalog.

2.2 Obtain linkage disequilibrium taSNPs from 1000 Genome Project

We first download CEU vcf files from (<ftp://share.sph.umich.edu/1000genomes/fullProject/2012.03.14/>) that contain all sequence variants information. The followed two steps are used to identify linkage disequilibrium SNPs >0.8 and located within 100kb of taSNPs. Firstly, we use vcftools to convert the vcf file format to PLINK format. Then we use PLINK to call the LD taSNPs by specifying options that limit the linkage disequilibrium SNPs >0.8 (`-ld-window-r2 0.8`) and within 100kb of taSNP (`-ld-window-kb 100`). The detailed commands are listed below,

```
vcftools -vcf vcf.file -out plink.file -plink plink -file plink.file -r2 -inter-chr  
-ld-snp-list snps.txt -ld-window-r2 0.8 -ld-window-kb 100 -out output.file -noweb
```

Finally, we have 90,700 SNP-trait associations and 78,247 unique linkage disequilibrium trait-associated SNP. We also build linkage disequilibrium taSNP into another GRanges object `taSNPLD`, which could be loaded into R console by typing `data(taSNPLD)`.

The format of `taSNPLD` is,

1. seqnames: Chromosome number associated with rs number
2. SNP_ID: SNP rs number

3. ranges: Chromosomal position, in base pairs, associated with rs number
4. Trait: Description of disease/trait examined in the study
5. Trait_Class: Trait class which is formed based on the phenotype tree. Close traits are grouped together to form one class.

2.3 Obtain background SNPs from 1000 Genome Project

We use the command `plink -file plink.file -freq -out chr` to retrieve all SNPs with corresponding MAF (minor allele frequency) from the CEU vcf files downloaded. There are totally 6,571,512 SNPs (MAF>0.05) excluding variants on Y chromosome. Those SNPs could serve as background in hypothesis testing. We build those SNPs into the built-in GRanges subject CEU into the package.

The format of CEU is,

1. seqnames: Chromosome number associated with rs number
2. SNP_ID: SNP rs number
3. ranges: Chromosomal position, in base pairs, associated with rs number

3 Using traseR

To assess the enrichment level of trait-associated SNPs in given genomic interval(s) using traseR, one needs to follow the simple steps below.

1. Prepare the genomic intervals in R object of either data frame format with column names chr,start,end or GRanges object
2. Query a given a set of genomic interval(s) against all the taSNPs in the collection, perform statistical analyses
3. Explore genes/SNPs of particular interest

3.1 Background selection

3.1.1 Whole genome

The assumption is each base could be possibly be the taSNP. Based on the assumption, with the number of taSNPs inside and outside the genomic interval(s), the number of bases inside and outside of the genomic interval(s), we could classify all bases based on the fact that one base is taSNP or not and in genomic intervals or not.

3.1.2 All SNPs

The assumption is each SNP could possibly be the taSNP. Based on the assumption, with the number of taSNPs inside and outside the genomic interval(s), the non-taSNPs inside and outside of the genomic interval(s), we could classify all SNPs based on the fact that one SNP is taSNP or not and in genomic intervals or not.

3.2 Hypothesis testing

traseR provides differential hypothesis testing methods in core function `traseR`, together with other functions for exploring and visualizing the results. The genomic interval(s) could be a data frame with three columns as `chr`(chromosome), `start`(genomic start position) and `end`(genomic end position) or a `GRanges` object. `traseR` offers either including LD SNPs or excluding LD SNPs as the taSNPs and either using the whole genome or all SNPs as the background for hypothesis testing.

If using whole genome as background, the command line is:

```
> x=traseR(snpdb=taSNP, region=Tcell)
> print(x)
```

If including the LD SNPs, the command line is:

```
> x=traseR(snpdb=taSNPLD, region=Tcell)
> print(x)
```

If using all SNPs as background, the command line is:

```
> x=traseR(snpdb=taSNP, region=Tcell, snpdb.bg=CEU)
```

For the above commands, `region` is the data frame; `snpdb` is taSNPs or including LD SNPs; `snpdb.bg` is background SNPs; If `rankby` is set as "pvalue", all traits will be sorted by p-value in increasing order; if `rankby` is set as "odds.ratio", all traits will be sorted by odds ratio in decreasing order. There are four options for `test.method` including "binomial", "chisq", "fisher", and "nonparametric" to perform binomial test, χ^2 test, Fisher's exact test and nonparametric respectively. If `alternative` is set to "greater", `traseR` will perform hypothesis testing on whether genomic intervals are enriched of taSNPs than the background; If `alternative` is set to "less", `traseR` will perform hypothesis testing on whether genomic intervals are depleted of taSNPs than the background.

3.2.1 χ^2 test and Fisher's exact test

Based on which background we choose, we could construct the 2 by 2 contingency table. then, we could perform χ^2 test on the table to assess the difference of proportions of taSNPs inside and outside of genomic intervals(s). We could also assume taSNPs inside genomic intervals follows hypergeometric distribution and calculate p-value directly using Fisher's exact test.

3.2.2 Binomial test

The assumption is the probability of observing a single base/SNP being a taSNP is the same inside and outside of genomic intervals. The probability of observing a single base/SNPs being a taSNP in genomic intervals could be estimated by using total number of taSNPs divided by the genome size/number of all SNPs. Then corresponding p-value could be calculated directly by Binomial test.

3.2.3 Nonparametric Test

Instead of imposing any assumption, the matched genomic interval(s) are generated by permuting the genomic intervals randomly N times and overlap with taSNPs in each time. Then we could calculate the empirical p-value directly by counting how many taSNP hits larger/smaller than the observed taSNP hits.

4 Choose appropriate statistical test method

Depending on the characteristics of the test statistics, we suggest to choose appropriate statistical test method under different scenarios,

- χ^2 test: the numbers in the contingency table is fairly large and balanced
- Fisher's exact test: the numbers of the contingency table is relatively small, e.g. no more than 20
- Nonparametric test: the number of query genomic intervals are small, e.g. no more than 1000
- Binomial test: default test method, not limited by sample size, distribution assumption and computational time

4.1 Example

To further illustrate the usage of traseR R package, we download H3K4me1 peak regions in peripheral blood T cell from Roadmap Epigenomics. Those peak regions are deemed the genomic intervals. Since the degree of enrichment level is measured by p-value, we could

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rank traits/trait classes based on p-value in an increasing order. We choose Binomial test as the default option for test.method, use whole genome as background and over-enrichment as hypothesis testing direction.

```

> library(traseR)
> data(taSNP)
> data(Tcell)
> x=traseR(taSNP,Tcell)
> print(x)

  Trait      p.value odds.ratio taSNP.hits taSNP.num
1  All 3.788373e-233  2.134717      2625     30553

      Trait      p.value      q.value odds.ratio
70      Behcet Syndrome 4.400406e-23 2.521433e-20  6.306579
176     Diabetes Mellitus, Type 1 1.704981e-11 4.884769e-09  5.045263
352     Lupus Erythematosus, Systemic 6.159346e-09 1.176435e-06  3.902195
52      Arthritis, Rheumatoid 1.442123e-07 2.065841e-05  5.126637
392     Multiple Sclerosis 1.644125e-05 1.884167e-03  2.905210
65      Autoimmune Diseases 5.201529e-05 4.967461e-03  15.892575

  taSNP.hits taSNP.num
70          59      274
176         33      185
352         32      223
52          20      112
392         26      236
65          6       15

      Trait_Class      p.value      q.value odds.ratio
17      Immune System Diseases 3.729169e-35 1.143835e-33  3.658860
31     Skin and Connective Tissue Diseases 6.932335e-35 1.143835e-33  3.916319
32      Stomatognathic Diseases 1.041455e-22 1.145601e-21  5.675922
14      Eye Diseases 3.479491e-18 2.870580e-17  3.313308
11      Digestive System Diseases 4.362324e-14 2.879134e-13  3.040672
7       Cardiovascular Diseases 3.008551e-11 1.654703e-10  1.602762
13      Endocrine System Diseases 6.933337e-09 3.268573e-08  2.068149
24     Nutritional and Metabolic Diseases 4.763509e-08 1.964948e-07  2.068673
21      Musculoskeletal Diseases 3.118359e-05 1.143398e-04  2.716680
23      Nervous System Diseases 5.549981e-05 1.831494e-04  1.495744
16     Hemic and Lymphatic Diseases 1.649261e-04 4.947782e-04  3.596622
22      Neoplasms 3.372076e-04 9.273210e-04  1.580636
30     Respiratory Tract Diseases 6.507770e-04 1.651972e-03  2.121839

```

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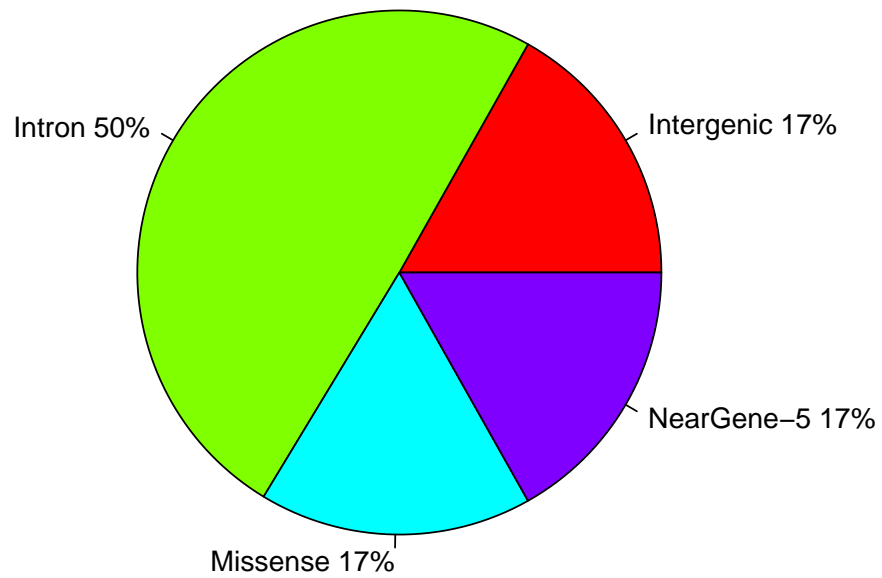
	taSNP.hits	taSNP.num
17	155	1122
31	142	970
32	63	318
14	87	689
11	74	633
7	253	3850
13	89	1076
24	79	956
21	27	260
23	122	1988
16	15	115
22	76	1181
30	29	349

4.2 Exploratory and visualization functions

Plot the distribution of SNP functional class

```
> plotContext(snpdb=taSNP, region=Tcell, keyword="Autoimmune")
```

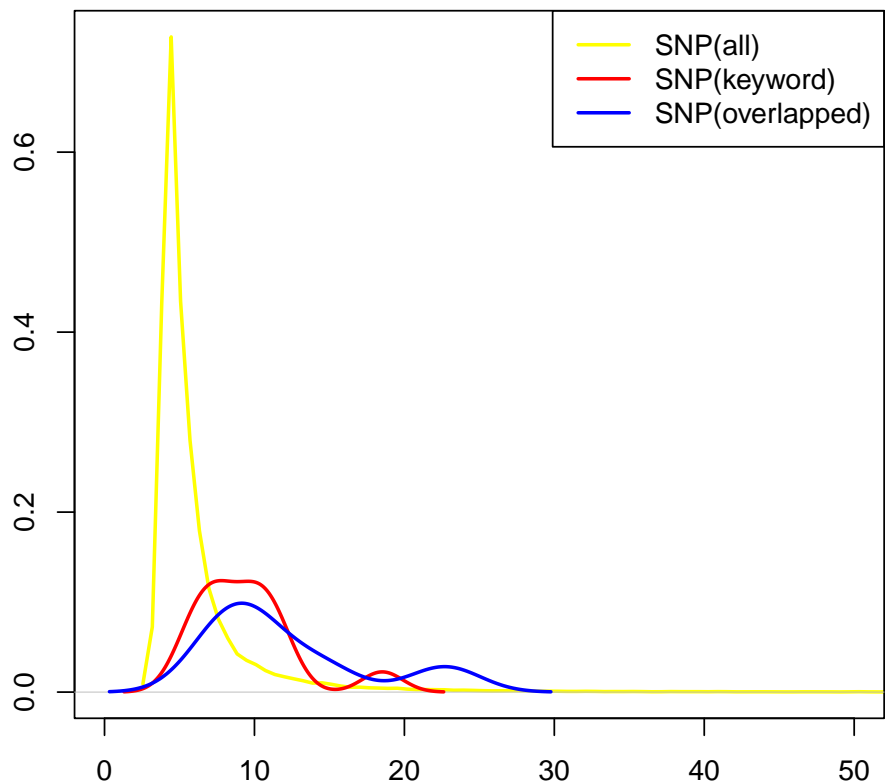
Pie Chart of Context



Plot the distribution of p-value of trait-associated SNPs

```
> plotPvalue(snpdb=taSNP, region=Tcell, keyword="autoimmune", plot.type="densityplot")
```

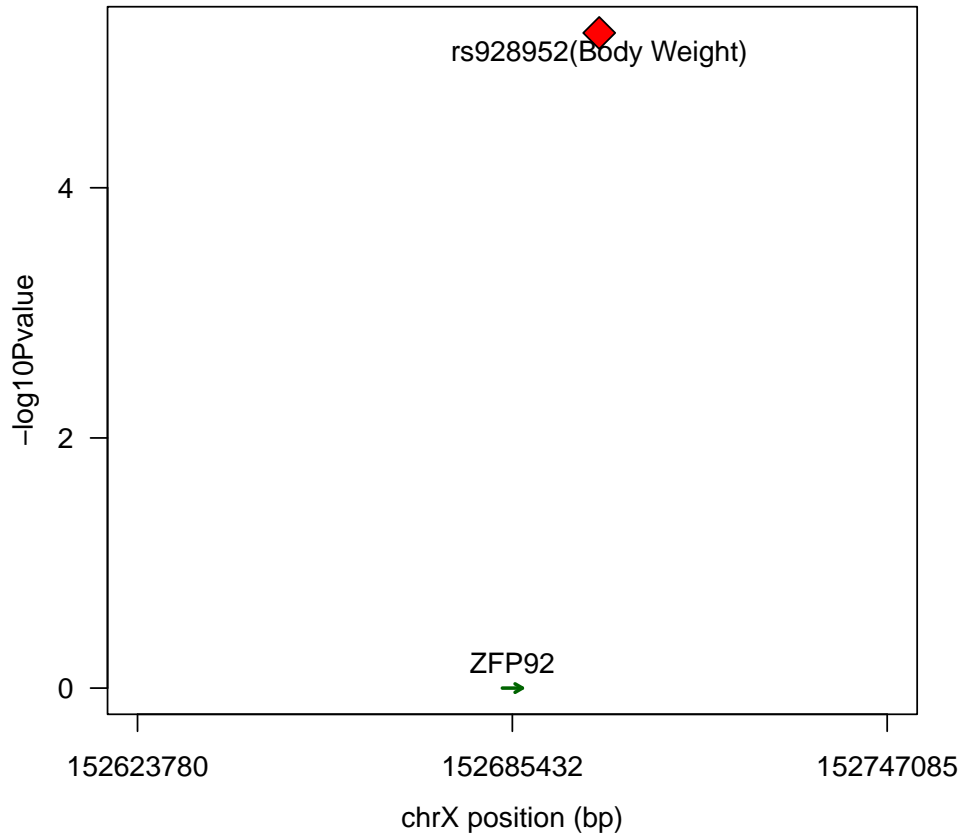
-log₁₀Pvalue Distribution



Plot SNPs or genes given genomic interval

```
> plotInterval(snpdb=taSNP, data.frame(chr="chrX", start=152633780, end=152737085))
```

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Query trait-associated SNPs by key word,

```
> x=queryKeyword(snpdb=taSNP,region=Tcell,keyword="autoimmune",returnby="SNP")  
> head(x)
```

	SNP_ID	Chr	Position	Trait.num	Trait.name
4343	rs11203203	chr21	43836186	1	Autoimmune Diseases
4341	rs1876518	chr2	65608909	1	Autoimmune Diseases
4348	rs1953126	chr9	123640500	1	Autoimmune Diseases
4342	rs2298428	chr22	21982892	1	Autoimmune Diseases
4345	rs7579944	chr2	30445026	1	Autoimmune Diseases
4338	rs864537	chr1	167411384	1	Autoimmune Diseases

Query trait-associated SNPs by gene name,

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```

> x=queryGene(snpdb=taSNP,genes=c("AGRN","UBE2J2","SSU72"))
> x

GRanges object with 3 ranges and 5 metadata columns:
      seqnames      ranges strand |  GENE_NAME Trait.num
      <Rle>        <IRanges> <Rle> | <character> <integer>
[1]   chr1  955502-991491    + |    AGRN        1
[2]   chr1 1477052-1510261    - |    SSU72        1
[3]   chr1 1189291-1209233    - |    UBE2J2        1
      Trait.name taSNP.num taSNP.name
      <character> <integer> <character>
[1]   Body Mass Index      1  rs3934834
[2]           Glucose      1  rs880051
[3]  Waist Circumference    1  rs11804831
-----
seqinfo: 23 sequences from an unspecified genome; no seqlengths

```

Query trait-associated SNPs by SNP name,

```

> x=querySNP(snpdb=taSNP,snpid=c("rs3766178","rs880051"))
> x

GRanges object with 2 ranges and 9 metadata columns:
      seqnames  ranges strand |  Trait  SNP_ID  p.value
      <Rle> <IRanges> <Rle> | <character> <character> <numeric>
42234   chr1  1478180    * |  Glucose  rs3766178  3.26e-05
42127   chr1  1493727    * |  Glucose  rs880051  6.44e-05
      Context  GENE_NAME GENE_START GENE_END GENE_STRAND
      <character> <character> <integer> <integer> <character>
42234   Intron    SSU72    1477052  1510261  -
42127   Intron    SSU72    1477052  1510261  -
      Trait_Class
      <character>
42234 Chemicals and Drugs ..
42127 Chemicals and Drugs ..
-----
seqinfo: 23 sequences from an unspecified genome; no seqlengths

```

5 Conclusion

traseR provides methods to assess the enrichment level of taSNPs in a given sets of genomic intervals. Moreover, it provides other functionalities to explore and visualize the results.

6 Session Info

```
> sessionInfo()

R version 4.6.0 (2026-04-24)
Platform: x86_64-pc-linux-gnu
Running under: Ubuntu 24.04.4 LTS

Matrix products: default
BLAS: /usr/lib/x86_64-linux-gnu/openblas-pthread/libblas.so.3
LAPACK: /usr/lib/x86_64-linux-gnu/openblas-pthread/libopenblas-r0.3.26.so; LAPACK version 3.12.0

locale:
 [1] LC_CTYPE=en_US.UTF-8      LC_NUMERIC=C
 [3] LC_TIME=en_US.UTF-8      LC_COLLATE=en_US.UTF-8
 [5] LC_MONETARY=en_US.UTF-8  LC_MESSAGES=en_US.UTF-8
 [7] LC_PAPER=en_US.UTF-8     LC_NAME=C
 [9] LC_ADDRESS=C             LC_TELEPHONE=C
[11] LC_MEASUREMENT=en_US.UTF-8 LC_IDENTIFICATION=C

time zone: Etc/UTC
tzcode source: system (glibc)

attached base packages:
[1] stats4      stats      graphics  grDevices  utils      datasets  methods
[8] base

other attached packages:
 [1] traseR_1.42.0           BSgenome.Hsapiens.UCSC.hg19_1.4.3
 [3] BSgenome_1.80.0        rtracklayer_1.72.0
 [5] BiocIO_1.22.0          Biostrings_2.80.1
 [7] XVector_0.52.0         GenomicRanges_1.64.0
 [9] Seqinfo_1.2.0          IRanges_2.46.0
[11] S4Vectors_0.50.1       BiocGenerics_0.58.1
```

```
[13] generics_0.1.4
```

```
loaded via a namespace (and not attached):
```

```
[1] SparseArray_1.12.2      bitops_1.0-9
[3] lattice_0.22-9         digest_0.6.39
[5] evaluate_1.0.5         grid_4.6.0
[7] fastmap_1.2.0          Matrix_1.7-5
[9] cigarillo_1.2.0        restfulr_0.0.16
[11] BiocManager_1.30.27    httr_1.4.8
[13] XML_3.99-0.23          codetools_0.2-20
[15] abind_1.4-8            cli_3.6.6
[17] rlang_1.2.0           crayon_1.5.3
[19] BiocStyle_2.40.0       Biobase_2.72.0
[21] DelayedArray_0.38.2    yaml_2.3.12
[23] S4Arrays_1.12.0        tools_4.6.0
[25] parallel_4.6.0         BiocParallel_1.46.0
[27] Rsamtools_2.28.0       SummarizedExperiment_1.42.0
[29] curl_7.1.0            buildtools_1.0.0
[31] R6_2.6.1              matrixStats_1.5.0
[33] xfun_0.57             GenomicAlignments_1.48.0
[35] sys_3.4.3             MatrixGenerics_1.24.0
[37] knitr_1.51            rjson_0.2.23
[39] htmltools_0.5.9       rmarkdown_2.31
[41] maketools_1.3.2       compiler_4.6.0
[43] RCurl_1.98-1.18
```

References

- [1] WELTER D, MACARTHUR J, MORALES J, BURDETT T, HALL P, JUNKINS H, KLEMM A, FLICEK P, MANOLIO T, HINDORFF L ET AL (2010). The NHGRI GWAS Catalog, a curated resource of SNP-trait associations. *Nucleic Acid Research*, **42**, D1001-1006.
- [2] ROADMAP EPIGENOMICS C, KUNDAJE A, MEULEMAN W, ERNST J, BILENKY M, YEN A, HERAVI-MOUSSAVI A, KHERADPOUR P, ZHANG Z, WANG J ET AL. (2015). Integrative analysis of 111 reference human epigenomes *Nature*, **7539**, 317-330

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[3] http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/projects/gapplusprev/sgap_plus.htm *Association Results Browser*

[4] <ftp://share.sph.umich.edu/1000genomes/fullProject/2012.03.14/> *1000Genome EUR*