



Reflections on AI

Q&A with
Zuzanna Warso

“People have the right to participate in decisions and processes that affect them”

The TUM IEAI had the pleasure of speaking with Zuzanna Warso. She is a Senior Research Analyst at Trilateral Research. Zuzanna leads Trilateral’s work in the PREVISION project where she oversees its ethics and human rights compliance.

1. What is the biggest misconception about Artificial Intelligence?

There are numerous myths about AI that impact the way we think about it. I think the biggest one is that every area of human activity would benefit from the deployment of AI, which I don’t think is true. Another myth, which is less spoken about, but also very harmful, is what has been referred to as the myth of clean tech. We often tend to think about AI as something disembodied and immaterial, while in reality it relies heavily on the physical world - on minerals and other resources (derived by undervalued and underpaid human labor) which build our computation systems.

2. What is the most important question in AI ethics right now?

I think the biggest and one of the most important questions in AI ethics right now has to do with the actual role that AI ethics should play. There is a legitimate concern that AI ethics are used as window dressings or as smoke screen.

I don’t believe that AI ethics can and should be thought of as an alternative to regulation or as a way to escape regulation,

but at the same time AI ethics should not be only limited to creating general guidelines and lists of abstract principles. AI ethics basically cannot be only debated, they should also be done in practice.

3. What is the role of academia, research institutions and other centers when it comes to the ethics and governance of AI?

Academia and research institutions have a key role to play in the implementation of AI ethics and making ethical principles operational. I think what is currently still missing in many cases is a proper ethics oversight of all individual research and innovation projects. We need a system of research ethics committees like that, from the field of medical research, where research with humans is carried out. Without such a system, it will be hard to ensure that the ethical principles are followed in practice.

4. What are the biggest challenges related to human rights and responsible development and use of AI?

In my opinion, it is the question of drawing red lines, defining things that should be done using AI under no circumstances, because the very idea violates human dignity. These should include research on the use of autonomous weapons systems, for example, citizens scoring, as it happens in China, but also large automated identification of people by means of facial recognition.

5. Why must civil society take part in the AI Ethics debate?

For me it is very simple, people have the right to participate in decisions and processes that affect them. I also think that the inclusion of civil society significantly improves the quality of the AI ethics debate and also the AI systems and products.

6. We often say that AI is changing or transforming the world. To what extent is AI changing us as humans?

The widespread use of AI can change how we do things, including how we relate and communicate with one another. But, the truth is that we are all participating in a huge experiment and only time will tell what the impacts and side-effects are.

Meet the Expert

Zuzanna Warso's work focuses on the intersection of science, technology, ethics and human rights law. She has been involved in several national and international interdisciplinary research projects exploring the ethics of new technologies and the impact of scientific and technological progress on human rights and freedoms. Since 2011, she has cooperated with the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, one of the leading European non-governmental human rights organizations.

Since 2019, she has been acting as an independent expert to the European Commission and is a Member of the IEAI Advisory Board. In addition, she has been actively involved in the work of the Women's Rights Group by the Polish Bar Council.

She holds a Master's Degree in Law, an M.A. in English Studies from the University of Warsaw and a PhD in Law from the University of Warsaw. Title of the thesis: The protection of fundamental rights in the area of scientific research in the international and European Union law.

Zuzanna passed the bar exam in April 2017 and served as the vice-president of the Human Rights Section of the Warsaw Bar Association from March 2016 until May 2017.

