Maria Axente, AI Programme Driver, PwC

Biography: Maria is currently the AI Programme Driver for PwC UK, and is responsible for helping clients to define their digital vision, and meet the challenges digital brings around mobile, social media, analytics and the cloud. Her consulting engagements have included leading the innovation and mobile work streams in a digital transformation programme for a leading UK media company and a large retailer, and design enhancement solutions for data intelligence and publishing products.

She is an advocate for Responsible AI and empowering youth with a voice to shape their futures.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

The first industrial revolution has given us much more than the economic growth and progress we enjoy, it has given us the social structure of our society as well. With the rapid growth of industrialization and growing productivity, the most valued members of society were those of working age, as they create growth. Slowly, we started to marginalise those either too young or too old to work. This created a growing separation between generations, and created patterns of behaviours we inherit today. Fast forward to 2019, ageism is yet another form of inequality and exclusion, alongside gender, race or sexuality. At a time when AI adoption is on the increase, some have said it is set to trigger a profound social revolution for humanity, but the jury is still out on who will benefit from those opportunities.

In day to day life, we have a flurry of examples of AI reinforcing those historic inequalities. From tools used to assess a defendant’s risk of committing more crimes in the US discriminating against people of color[^1] to the AI powered recruiting tool biased towards male candidates, AI tools are shedding light on where inequality exists in our society, deeply embedded in our culture and norms. As Pedro Domingo, the author of Master Algorithm says: ‘We see AI not as it is, but as we are.’ And while some have jumped to describe AI as a ‘black mirror’ we owe it to ourselves to have a more optimistic view, an opportunity to focus our actions to address inequality.

meaningfully, in a holistic way, extending focus beyond data and algorithms, through the value chain, into the business processes and culture.

But how do we address it in a meaningful way? Lyndon B. Johnson, the 36th president of the United States said in 1969 “Great social change tends to come rapidly, in periods of intense activity and progress before the impulse slows. We must open the doors of opportunity. But we must also equip our people to walk through those doors. “A statement more relevant than ever half a century later, but also a great example to follow.

To achieve meaningful and long term diversity for and in AI, we should approach it as cultural transformation effort, with formal actions, indicators to measure success and a roadmap, following the Top Down – Bottom UP methodology. Leaders need to co-create the opportunities alongside diverse groups while equipping them with the right skills to get there. But we also need everyone’s participation, especially those who are now coming of age in the age of AI to be agents and promoters of diversity. Decision makers involved in AI should aim to create participatory decision making at all levels, from strategic to operational, from policy-making to AI product development. The Pineapple Report\(^2\) authored by Jonnie Penn for the European Youth Forum, presents a set of concrete actions for citizen participation and engagement. Digital-Participatory tools like digital field hearings or citizen juries can be used to welcome citizens of all walks of life into the AI design and deployment process. In the UK, citizens’ juries have already been used to develop policy on ethical artificial intelligence. We would also benefit from having young people part of advisory boards or other leadership groups on AI. The appointment of Kriti, the Advisory Board of the Centre for Data Ethics and AI Council, is an example we should follow.

Once opportunities are created, we need to empower and support participation, through AI literacy. The specific elements of AI should be reflected in the formal education curriculum, but also via support of alternative forms of education like grants for online courses and funding for those programmes. An excellent example of such a programme is Elements of AI\(^3\), a free online AI beginner’s course to educate an increasingly inquisitive global audience on AI and the technology’s potential impact on society, careers and their everyday lives. Students enrolling in the course come from all age groups, with 140,000 students completed the course from 80 different countries in less than a year from its launch. The programmes is the result of a successful partnership between the University of Helsinki and Reaktor, a technology consulting firm.

Another great initiative aimed to address both gender and age diversity in the tech industry is Tech She Can charter\(^4\) backed by over 100 organisations including PwC, JP Morgan, British Science Association, Tesco and the UK Government. The charter,

\(^2\) https://www.youthforum.org/new-pineapple-report
\(^3\) https://www.elementsofai.com/
\(^4\) https://www.pwc.co.uk/who-we-are/women-in-technology/tech-she-can-charter.html
a cross-society collaboration aimed to support and inspire more young girls to consider a tech career, helps address two United Nation Sustainable development Goals – number 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and number 5 on gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls.

Lastly, diversity and inclusion should be fostered at a global level. The AI community has a duty of care to encourage and support meaningful dialogue and knowledge exchange between all countries, with AI missions to those who are just embarking on the AI journey. AI event’ organisers, play an important role in encouraging this dialogue by actively promoting diversity beyond gender and race, to include age and nationalities. This was something that was evident at the recent AI for Good Global Summit\(^5\), event that boosted speakers and attendees from 90 countries and all ages. Organisers should work with governments to provide visas and financial support for young researchers and entrepreneurs from developing countries to attend events like NeuRIPS.

But ultimately, for those recommendations and case studies to have a positive and profound impact on diversity and inclusion for truly Responsible AI\(^6\), they should be regarded holistically and flexibly, with ideas adapted to fit local contexts and then piloted before being rolled out. What they all share in common is a view, as Jonnie Penn points out\(^7\), of co-designing and co-creating of AI solutions, towards the same goal of inclusive, sustainable and socially just data economies, where we all have the opportunity to create and share the benefits and protect the planet.

\(^5\) [https://aiforgood.itu.int/](https://aiforgood.itu.int/)


\(^7\) [https://news.itu.int/how-can-ai-influence-your-values-interview-with-jonnie-penn-video/](https://news.itu.int/how-can-ai-influence-your-values-interview-with-jonnie-penn-video/)