



COPENHAGEN LEGAL TECH LAB — PODCAST

EPISODE 11 – FEMINIST DATA AND A.I.

In this episode, Alexandra Andhov, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Copenhagen and founder of the Copenhagen Legal Tech Lab, Léonard Van Rompaey, Industrial Post-Doc at the Faculty of Law, and Anastasia Karagianni, Visiting PhD Researcher, discuss the topic of A.I., focusing on how feminist data could make this technology more inclusive and fairer.

00:00:00

Intro music

00:00:07,040

Alexandra Andhov

Hello and welcome to the Copenhagen Legal Tech Lab podcast at the Faculty of Law, at the University of Copenhagen, where we address innovation and the law from three angles: people, technology, and business.

Today we continue on the topic connected to Law, innovation and vulnerability with one co-host Léonard Van Rompaey, a Post-doc at the faculty, and our guest speaker, Anastasia Karagianni, who is currently visiting PhD researcher here at the faculty but who is a PhD student in the Faculty of Law at the University of Athens in Greece and co-founder of DATAWO, an advocacy organisation about gender equality, in the digital era, which is based in Greece. And in her PhD, Anastasia focuses on the implementation of gender equality and non-discrimination principles in the international and European regulatory frameworks in regard to artificial intelligence.

Welcome, Anastasia.

00:01:15,409

Anastasia Karagianni

Hello. Thank you for having me here today with you.

00:01:20,420

Alexandra Andhov

So, given the fact or given the focus of your PhD, we wanted to bring you to our podcast and to discuss with you the challenges that are there for A.I. and jump right in for our listeners in your perspectives based on your research, what are the three biggest challenges that A.I. faces?

00:01:42,060

Anastasia Karagianni

In brief, I would say that the three main challenges that are set by A.I systems are, first of all, the lack of transparency and explainability. Secondly, the lack of accountability and third, the omnipresence of AI systems in the digital welfare state in in public and private sector.

But let me elaborate more on this, regarding transparency and explainability. There is this main problem of black box effect, which is commonly known in A.I. This means in brief that the way that an algorithm is trained and programmed is not obvious to the end user. This creates many problems because if there is any discriminatory treatment by an algorithm, which is commonly known as algorithmic bias, and the user has been damaged and want to make a suit at the court cannot have the relevant evidence to exercise their right to compensation, for instance.

As far as the lack of accountability is concerned, there are many problematic issues about this lack, because the problem is that we don't know, as users of an A.I. system, who is behind this? Behind this A.I. system is there the A.I. builder like the A.I. team who has designed or who has deployed the AI system or is there the company or any other person, stakeholder that was responsible during the decision-making process?

And as far as the omnipresence of A.I. system is concerned, this is very problematic, because on the on the one hand, we support digital technologies. Digital technologies are created because they facilitate our daily lives. For instance, when we want to make an application for a social benefit to the state, we may think that if this application was to be examined by an algorithm, we will probably have, as a result, an impartial and objective decision. But we have noticed that all the all the A.I. systems replicate the bias of the society. The bias of the A.I. builders.

00:04:51,129

Léonard Van Rompaey

Garbage in. Garbage out.

00:04:56,620

Anastasia Karagianni

Yes, exactly. So, we support digital technologies, but we support the use of these digital technologies in human rights way.

00:05:01,860

Alexandra Andhov

Okay, so now having a picture in front of us, what are the challenges when it comes to A.I. How can your project the feminist ai, address some of these challenges?

00:05:18,339

Anastasia Karagianni

Yes, but before answering to this question, I would like to say some things about what this project is about. So please give me one minute.

First of all, this project was created with the participants of the trustworthy and Artificial Intelligence Working Group of Mozilla Foundation. In this project, we tried to create a feminist dictionary in A.I. So, we tried to see what are the key concepts and terms that can be used during all the A.I process, but with the lenses of gender. And let me explain at this point what I mean by A.I process. So, I mean that the first stage of an A.I process is the setup of the A.I team. And the last point of the A.I process is the improvement stage where the feedback about the use of an A.I system was used in order to improve it and make it better to mitigate any bias, for instance.

So, in this dictionary we tried to see how gender equality and non-discrimination can be implemented. So, for instance, we tried to see, what does sexism in A.I? So, if I'm ask you this question, how could you define sexism, in A.I? Could you provide easily an answer? So we tried to see what Homophobia in A.I? What is gender bias? And all these issues that are related with implementation of gender equality.

So, we think that this feminist dictionary is a good way to make the A.I builders and the stakeholders who are very responsible in policy and decision-making processes about A.I to make them familiar with the feminist theory with a queer theory, with gender equality and non-discrimination principles. And in this way, we think that the dictionary will help us visualise a more inclusive A.I world.

00:07:48,439

Léonard Van Rompaey

So, I have a question for you Anastasia, about some of the solutions that are presented for solving that question of gender balance, of discrimination more largely, not just necessarily on gender, but sometimes also on race and origins, on class, background and so on. And one of the solutions that is often put forward is the idea that we need representation in engineering teams, in data science teams. From the beginning of the design of AI systems, you need to have, not just your typical cis-white heterosexual male, but also people of colour, women, maybe queer people as well and so on. And that having those people in those teams is the best solution to ensure that we get less discriminatory A.I less gender balance day.

I have a problem with that solution. I think potentially, you know I'm not saying we shouldn't have representation in those teams, of course, I'm completely up for that. However, it seems to me like this becomes an easy excuse for the industry not to do anything because there aren't that many women or people of colour that come out of computer sciences. And, I have I have a friend of mine who's trans feminine data scientist. And she was telling me that the biggest the number one job for transfeminine people is actually A.I. scientists. Which is amazing for them.

So, there's this problem of there's not enough people that come out of engineering schools and I.T. education to have necessarily people of colour and women easily on every engineering team, just because there's such an overrepresentation of white males coming out of those schools.

So, it becomes an easy excuse to say, oh, yeah, that's the solution. We can't do anything about it.

Are there other things we can do in terms of deconstruction the studies, in terms of new skills to, you know, to actually deal with the problem from both ends?

00:10:25,799

Anastasia Karagianni

This is actually a very good point. Thank you for asking this question.

First of all, I would like to clarify that by representation, I don't mean quotas. For instance, I don't believe that obliging and company to hire other genders, like women, more women, in the A.I team will solve the problem because this is again a discriminatory treatment. When I'm talking about misrepresentation or under representation of genders in A.I, I mean, that girls, women femininities do not have the inspiration, or the role models to follow an A.I career.

And, for instance, a personal example. When I was a kid, I have a twin brother, I wanted to learn programming and coding. But many people told me that "You are a girl. You are a femininity. This is very masculine to you". But of course, I didn't give up. I learned coding and programming and I followed my dream. So, I would like to see more role models, more feminine role models in A.I.

And of course, I don't believe that this will solve the problems. And I agree with you at this point. But besides that, besides representation, I think that we should give to women the opportunity to still follow their career in A.I, and, I mean, like, for instance, this is related with parental leave. Probably a woman would be data scientist or a computer scientist. But if she becomes a mother, then does she have the opportunity to come back again in the company or in the organisation?

I mean, like, besides representation, there are other issues that concern mostly women and gender bias in the working environment, in workforce.

But as far as the A.I field is concerned, I think that we should do more about mitigating biases about the use of an A.I system against other genders. Of course, about the values that are these systems are embedded and fitted with, we can do more.

00:13:12,649

Alexandra Andhov

Okay, so what I hear is actually in the A.I world that ultimately mirrors our real-life world, right? Because you're mentioning some of the reasons why we do not see a more balanced A.I out there is precisely the challenges that we face in our day-to-day life, right? The fact that women are

underrepresented in managerial positions. Women are underrepresented in decision making positions. Because of how the architecture of our society looks today.

And this is obviously not just an A.I issue. So now, trying to maybe connect these two worlds in your perspective, what is the number one thing we should do to and maybe now focusing more on the more balanced and gender equal A.I, what is it that we need to do as a society?

00:14:18,850

Anastasia Karagianni

Probably I will answer that we need more gender data. And probably I am influenced because this period I'm reading the book titled "Invisible Women". And I realised that the main problem, gender bias, is the lack of gender data. There is a gender data gap. For instance, there is everywhere, like in administration, in private sectors, in companies, in tests, in health care systems. There are there are no women, like the women are actually invisible. I will not talk about the other genders. So, to me, we need more data. We need more data from the queer or LGBT community, because in this way, making these groups of people visible, we can make and adjust the already existing A.I system, more friendly and more inclusive to them.

And of course, this is not an issue about inclusion, I mean, like, it's not that I visualise now rainbows, it has an essence in practise because the use of these A.I systems has an impact on the human rights. For instance, if I am if I am a trans-male or trans-female, for instance, and I apply to a position in a company, and my application is rejected because of my gender, my right to employment is not implemented. I have the right to work, but how I can actually have this right in practise?

Or for instance, if I have the right, in a fair trial and in the first justice, and we are talking about the design of the e-justice, that is going an algorithm to be built and be fitted with, data about justice and about other previous cases, because in this way, the court decision will be more impartial and more objective. And if this court decision, which is going to be made by an algorithm, treat me in a discriminatory way, I will have an impact on my human rights of fair trial.

So, it's not about inclusion. It's about justice. It's about social justice.

00:17:14,910

Alexandra Andhov

Okay, so last question here, and I also would wonder what your thoughts are on this. Léonard. You know what I heard now is about ultimately, we need more data. We need more data about, let's say queer. We need more data about women. We need more data, obviously, about different groups of our society. And, you know, maybe I'm old generation, but to me, this sounds also having data that can target these groups.

So how are we able to collect more data that can help us build more balanced A.I? But at the same time not possibly open a box, how data can be misused and targeted against groups that still today do not hold the same rights as the majority.

00:18:15,049

Anastasia Karagianni

Thank you for this question. I think that this question is related with vulnerability and also with filtering of data. And to me, this sounds like more with the problem of filtering of data and the use of data. I mean, like, of course, we need more data, but we need to use them in a proper way, having into account that we are going to use them in order to promote justice and to promote fairness and inclusion. Because if we were going to collect this data just for saying that we did that, it's zero point.

00:18:58,119

Léonard Van Rompaey

Probably also malevolent groups that want, if you use this kind of data, to target minorities to target women for some reason or another, probably if they want to do that, they're already doing it and they'll do it regardless of whether we actually try to collect and use the data for good reason. So might as well do it.

00:19:26,3399

Alexandra Andhov

So, no matter what, we should still try to do it and obviously design a way how to do it in the best possible.

00:19:37,539

Anastasia Karagianni

And I think that this is also related with the business model, with the design of the business model or the state model. Is this business model according to gender equality? Because again, probably we shouldn't have gender bias if there were some values embedded in the system. So, it's not only about data and the use of data, it's a complex issue, and we need to approach it in interdisciplinary way and having into our minds other groups of people that might be affected.

00:20:20,240

Alexandra Andhov

So, in an interdisciplinary and inclusive way.

And with this kind of message, I will thank my co-host, Léonard and our guest, Anastasia Karagianni, for joining us for the conversation about feminist data.

Thank you for listening. This is Copenhagen Legal Tech Lab podcast. And we also are obviously thankful for the support from the Faculty of Law and from Dreyers Foundation.

00:20:53,069

Anastasia Karagianni

Thank you so much.

00:20:53,069

Léonard Van Rompaey

Thank you.

00:20:58,269 - outro

This is Copenhagen Legal Tech Lab podcast at the Faculty of Law, University of Copenhagen.

Brought to you by the Dreyers Foundation.

And don't forget to subscribe and follow us on social media and your favourite podcast platform.