SUMMARY
FARI BRUSSELS CONFERENCE
2024 | AI, A PUBLIC GOOD?

Can AI be a public good? ❞

On **November 18-19, 2024, FARI – AI for the Common Good Institute (VUB-ULB)** hosted the **FARI Brussels Conference 2024** at Studio Flagey and BeCentral in Brussels. Under the theme **"AI, a Public Good?"**, the conference explored the role of **AI, data, and robotics in shaping a sustainable and equitable future**.

This document provides an overview of the conference, highlighting key figures and takeaways that aim to inspire reflection on the future of AI and its societal impact.

Authors:
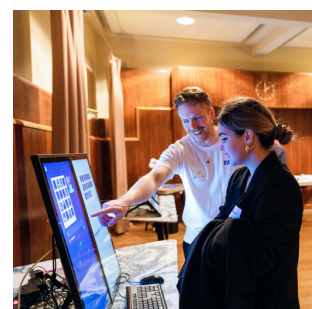**Sezen Avci**, FARI
Laura Jousset, FARI

Editor:
Carl Mörch, FARI

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FARI Brussels Conference 2024

Key figures

IMPACT
2 days of conferences filled with discussions and expert insights

OUTREACH
Over 800 participants, with 600+ attendees on the first day only

DIVERSITY
42 speakers, including 48% women and 55% international

EXPERTISE
6 panels and **3 keynotes** addressing the societal impact of AI

BRIDGES
12 partner-led sessions connecting academia, industry, and the public sector

EXPERIENCE
11 booths, 7 FARI demos and **5 artistic exhibit**s, enriching the experience

Conference Day
November 18 at Studio Flagey

Opening Remarks

The conference opened on November 18th with addresses from academic leaders, EU representatives, and diplomats, emphasizing the importance of ethical AI, governance, and international collaboration.

Cécile Huet (European Commission) presented the **AI Act** and the EU's commitment to **human-centric AI**.

Xavier Lapeyre de Cabanes (French Ambassador) and **Martin Kotthaus** (German Ambassador) reiterated the importance of **international collaboration on AI governance**.

Rectors **Jan Danckaert** (VUB) and **Annemie Schaus** (ULB) discussed **AI accessibility**, related university AI initiatives, and the important efforts to train their communities in AI.

Keynote Takeaway

Mireille Hildebrandt (VUB) introduced how to interpret and understand **the concepts of "public good"**, questioning the technological race and advocating for AI that prioritizes public welfare over corporate interests.

Theresa Züger (AI & Society Lab) provided insights on the intersection of **AI, democracy, and digital sovereignty**, emphasizing the importance of citizen participation and transparent governance in AI policy.

Yoshua Bengio (Mila & University of Montreal) warned of **AGI risks**, calling for more democratic oversight, hardware-enabled safety measures, and international cooperation to prevent an AI arms race.

Watch their keynote speeches on the **FARI YouTube** channel

Panel Discussions

Assessing AI, Data, and Robotics in Public Service Missions

The session focused on **the ethical use of AI and big data in public services**, underlining the need for transparency, accountability, and public trust. Speakers highlighted the importance of ethical frameworks, public awareness, and innovation tools, demonstrating **how AI can address societal challenges**. Examples such as CaseAI and EU data management initiatives illustrated AI's role in improving public service delivery responsibly. Experts emphasized **collaboration and responsible governance** as essential for ensuring technology benefits all citizens.

From Private Innovation to Public Benefit: Conditions for Real Positive Impact, and Possible Risks

This session explored **how AI, robotics, and data-sharing can drive societal change**, focusing on urban mobility, climate action, and public service improvements. Speakers discussed optimizing traffic management, promoting climate action through data-sharing, and enhancing public services using AI tools like chatbots. They emphasized **the crucial role of public-private collaboration** in maximizing the potential benefits of these technologies while addressing possible risks, including public acceptance and ethical concerns.

Can AI, Data, and Robotics Research be Open and Accessible to All? Exploring the Challenges

The session emphasized **the importance of making AI, data, and robotics research accessible to all**, with a focus on collaboration, equitable access, and ethical considerations. Speakers discussed the challenges in infrastructure, data management, and the need for regulations to ensure AI fosters positive change across diverse fields. Key insights included **sharing knowledge, resources, and expertises, balancing openness with data sensitivity, and ensuring safety through AI regulation**.

Panel Discussions

AI for Europe: A Critical Need for Today and Tomorrow

The session explored **AI's role in shaping Europe's future**, highlighting the EU's efforts to balance innovation with long-term sustainability. Experts reviewed the EU AI strategy, the AI Act, and other regulatory frameworks, comparing them with global approaches. The discussion emphasized **the need for a strong European technological infrastructure** to ensure competitiveness while maintaining ethical, trustworthy, and human-centered AI development.

Working Together: How Citizens, Companies, Governments, and Researchers Should Help Shape AI, Data, and Robotics

This session focused on **the importance of collaboration** among citizens, businesses, governments, and researchers **to ensure the ethical and inclusive development of AI**. Speakers highlighted the risks of power imbalances, biases, and technological determinism, advocating for public participation in AI governance. Successful models like Tampere's responsible AI frame-work and Montreal's AI Declaration were presented as examples of community-driven AI approaches that foster trust and equity.

Creative Futures: Envisioning AI, Data, and Robotics' Role in Culture, Arts, and Society

The session explored **the transformative impact of AI, data, and robotics on culture and creativity**. It covered the philosophical dimensions of AI in art, immersive augmented reality storytelling, and generative AI's role in personalizing cultural experiences. Speakers showcased how these technologies can expand artistic possibilities for creators and enhance accessibility and engagement in cultural institutions for audiences. Emphasis was placed on balancing innovation with preserving human creativity, ensuring technology complements rather than replaces human imagination

Partners' Day
November 19 at BeCentral

On November 19th, the FARI Brussels Conference was followed by an exciting series of **partner-organized events** exploring the theme **"AI, a Public Good?"**. The day brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including **European institutions, private companies, public administrations, Belgian and international organizations, and research associations**, to deepen discussions on AI's role in society.

LOCAL DIGITAL TWINS FOR POSITIVE ENERGY DISTRICTS

OASC examined how Local Digital Twins (LDTs) can support the adoption of Positive Energy Districts (PEDs), with insights from the **BIPED and ExPEDite projects and EU stakeholders.**

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN DIGITAL TWIN PROJECT

This **FARI** session highlighted global efforts to **engage citizens in urban planning through 3D digital models**, addressing challenges such as air quality and mobility. It showcased collaborations between cities, NGOs, and local communities.

GOVTECH: FROM BRUSSELS TO WASHINGTON

Co-organized with hub.brussels, this session featuring innovative **Belgian and US companies** explored how technology can meet the needs of local governments and foster public-private-academic partnerships.

AI IN ARTS

Gluon brought together experts in neuroscience, art and philosophy for a symposium at WIELS museum to explore the **links between AI, creativity and human expression**.

RESPONSIBLE INNOVATION IN AI EDUCATION

SIPRI and **UNODA** brought together **professors and researchers** to discuss integrating responsible innovation into AI curricula. The round-table focused on building a global network to foster responsible AI practices.

EMPOWERING REGIONS WITH BIG DATA

Powered by **European Commission Big Data Test Infrastructure (BDTI)**, this workshop explored how data re-use can improve **public policies and services**, offering open-source tools to support data experimentation for more efficient governance.

FINAL PITCH: FARI AI ACCELERATOR

The event, held in collaboration with **VUB BUDA**, showcased innovation from **the FARI AI Accelerator's second cohort** with the graduation pitch by **Johan van Mol** of No-Kno on inclusivity in business communications.

AI & DEMOCRACY

The roundtable hosted by **Make.org** and **ifok** explored AI's role in supporting democratic processes and citizen engagement, discussing initiatives like **Make.org's Democratic Commons and ifok GmbH's Civic Coding program**.

REGULATORY & INNOVATION SANDBOXES FOR APPLIED AI TECHNOLOGIES

This **AI Sandbox Summit** organized by **CAIRNE** explored the challenges and best practices for testing AI technologies within regulatory frameworks, aiming to enhance innovation ecosystems across Europe.

EDIH EU MATCHMAKING

SustAin.Brussels and **CAIRNE** joined forces to connected **SMEs, academic institutions, and funding agencies**, and discuss sustainable AI in EU proposals and innovation opportunities in European programs

THE ROLE OF DATA STEWARDS IN THE EU'S DATA STRATEGY

This **Data Tank** session focused on implementing the **EU's Data Strategy and Data Spaces**, with an emphasis on data stewardship, governance, and sustainability to foster innovation in data practices.

Key Takeaways

AI as a Public Good

The discussions emphasized AI's role as a public good, driving innovation while ensuring equitable benefits. **Ethical governance** and **policies** are essential to address AI's impacts on jobs, privacy, and social equality. **Accountability and regulation** are necessary to harness AI responsibly, prioritizing collective well-being and preventing its misuse in perpetuating inequality or surveillance.

The future of AI

The future of AI demands urgently the development of ethical systems prioritizing fairness, sustainability, and the common good. While AI's transformative potential is vast, its design must focus on **long-term societal benefits**, not just economic gains. AI should be viewed as a powerful tool that shapes the future in alignment with shared human values.

AI & Creative Arts

AI is transforming the arts by enhancing accessibility and **expanding creative possibilities** through generative AI and au-gmented reality. While it offers new ways to engage with art, human creativity must remain cen-tral, ensuring **AI complements rather than replaces human imagination**. Ethical concerns regarding AI's influence on identity, values, and traditional media are crucial.

AI in Europe

In Europe, AI is increasingly seen as **a tool to advance public policy**, sustainability, and social welfare, guided by values of transparency, privacy, and accountability. The European Commission focuses on human-centric AI, **balancing innovation with ethical principles** to ensure safety, fairness, and human rights protection. These efforts aim to achieve independence from global powers and foster a sovereign AI ecosystem rooted in ethical leadership.

The ethics of AI

AI must respect **human dignity, rights, autonomy, and privacy**. While offering significant potential for societal development, AI must be carefully managed to avoid exacerbating inequalities. Strong ethical oversight is necessary to ensure AI serves humanity's best interests as a public good.

Urban Development

AI holds potential to **support urban development through Local Digital Twins (LDTs) and citizen engagement**. LDTs help address urban energy challenges and drive sustainable transitions i.e., cities like Tokyo and Copenhagen are leveraging LDTs to tackle air quality and mobility issues. Collaboration between cities, NGOs, and communities is key to creating more sustainable urban environments.

Food for Thoughts

How could policies and regulatory frameworks better **ensure that AI serves the common good** without exacerbating inequalities or compromising privacy?

How do we **balance technological advancement with ethical considerations** like fairness, dignity, and accountability?

How can **AI innovations accelerate sustainability in cities**, and what challenges exist in diverse urban contexts?

Can AI replicate human creativity, or will it remain a tool for human expression? How should we **redefine the boundaries between human** and **machine-made art**?

Can AI **"**
be a public
good?

At the heart of the **FARI Brussels Conference 2024**, this question prompted rich discussions across various sectors, emphasizing the need for continued interdisciplinary dialogue. The conference exemplified the **importance of collaboration** between artists, technologists, scientists, policymakers, and civil society to ensure technology enhances societal well-being. The 2024 event concluded with an immediate **call to action for an inclusive and sustainable AI-driven future.**

The FARI Brussel Conference 2024 has been honored with an award by visit.brussels: **Brussels Business Events Ambassadors 2025**

Thank you to our #FARI2024 sponsors and partners

FARI - AI for the Common Good Institute Brussels
Cantersteen 16, 1000 Brussels
www.fari.brussels