BRITISH COUNCIL

Stronger Together Programme – EU Region

Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good

Activity Report 2023-2024

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contents

Stronger Together
Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good

Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good is one of the four strands of Stronger Together, the British Council's youth leadership programme that aims to offer skills development opportunities and connect young leaders with policymakers, academics, businesses, and civil society organizations.

In partnership with a range of business as well as research and innovation partners, through the Stronger Together, Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good we aspire to engage young people in using AI for the common good by offering opportunities for skills building, sharing and creating innovative ideas and exchanging with policy makers and experts for upscaling their potential to influence the future of AI for social action.

This report includes this year's activities that engaged young people from 5 European countries including the UK. Building on last year's successful results, this year's program featured five AI hackathons across Europe and the UK, a blended preparatory session with winning teams of the hackathons to prepare to engage in a conversation with AI experts, a Study trip to the UK and a dialogue event among young adults and AI experts; representatives of academia, policymaking and the industry to discuss the social impact and the future of AI technologies.

The report gathers the rich and collective production of ideas of young adults and reflects the remarkable journey of working together, exchanging and constructing a dialogue on the future of AI and the impact in our society.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is one of technology's latest innovations that is expected to change our lives rapidly. Its ever-growing potential can be applied to diverse industries, unlocking possibilities to generate solutions to global challenges. As we stand in front of a future shaped by AI, it is imperative that we navigate this technological frontier with foresight, responsibility, and a commitment to harness its potential for the common good. The emergence of AI can be a profound opportunity to move towards a more intelligent, equitable, and sustainable world. But what do young people think about AI? What are their needs?

AI for the Common Good programme was developed to respond to these needs and offer young people the opportunity to develop specialised skills but also engage them into a dialogue with experts and support them in shaping the future of AI technologies.

AI for the Common Good programme aims to:

- engage young people in using AI for common good by building skills
- offer opportunities to young people to share and create innovative ideas
- facilitate dialogue with policy makers, industry experts and researchers and increase their capacity to influence the future of AI.

Timeline of activities

AI for the Common Good hackathons in countries
Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, United Kingdom:
November – December 2023

The five hackathons took place in Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland and the UK. At these events young people explored how AI can serve as a tool to mitigate climate change. They were invited to work in teams and generate creative ideas on the theme of **Green Cities**. Each country team joined forces with local partner organisations that ranged from universities, vocational institutions, research and innovation centres.

The programme included a training session with Mike Lloyd, tech expert and founder of learntech.io. During the training, participants were introduced to basic facts and examples of the climate change and how AI various models can help tackle it. Participants were asked to think of innovative solutions using AI models to respond to issues that would improve life in the cities towards a greener future. Mike assisted teams with facilitating their ideas and transforming them into business ideas ready to be presented to possible investors.

Participants collaborated to design a solution addressing a specific challenge of the city using AI models that were introduced to them during the training. Then, they would pitch their ideas in front of a jury panel that would decide which idea is the most attractive based on criteria of sustainability, social impact, innovation, business viability and presentation.

The winning teams would win a Study visit in Bristol, one of the leading sustainable cities of the UK, where they would meet teams from all countries, visit relevant organisations and institutions of the UK and engage in a dialogue with experts of the field of AI.

Quick win: In Hungary, participants were called to respond to a real challenge for the city of Budapest. Brought by **Budapest Enterprise Agency and Centre for Budapest Transport (BKK)** that provided real data and offered an award for their solution!
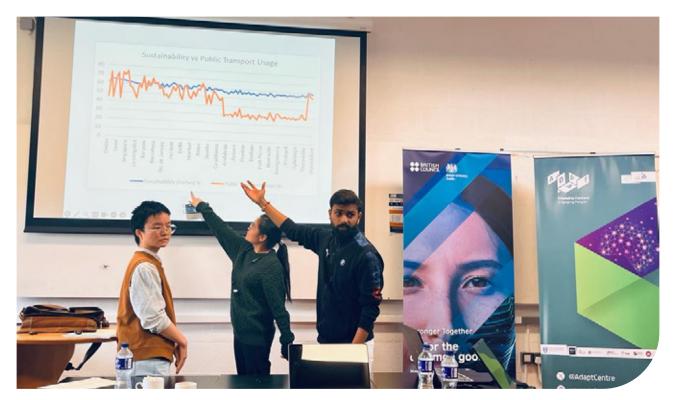
What people thought of the hackathons:

"What drew me to the programme was the potential for interdisciplinary exchange and real-world application of the learning to both my own research and use in future studies. I signed up for the hackathon with minimal theoretical understanding of AI/coding and zero practical skills in the area. I was initially fearful about joining the sessions because of this inexperience. I voiced my concerns to organisers beforehand and was met with the utmost confidence that I would be able to participate. I never felt out of place during the sessions; there were multiple points of entry to each topic which meant that each participant could work away at their own level, learning from the basics on day one, all the way up to complex ideas regarding the application of learning machines and more on day two."

- Nic, Ireland

Participants were invited to generate creative ideas aimed at improving people's lives in urban areas by making them more sustainable and eco-friendlier.

Hackathon in Cork, Ireland

AI for the Common Good Hackathon in Cork, Ireland
Dates: 1–2 November 2023
Partner organisations: British Embassy in Dublin
Human-Centered AI Research Group (HAI) at Munster Technological University (MTU)
Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre ADAPT

Winning idea: **My City Roots, Ireland**
This initiative targets atmospheric CO2 reduction by encouraging strategic tree planting in Cork City, leveraging AI and community engagement. Cork residents are invited to choose their preferred locations for tree planting, with the help of AI tools analysing these preferences to identify the optimal planting sites. This collaborative effort of our team relies on support from the Cork government, which will provide maps indicating approved planting areas and undertake the responsibility of planting. Participants will be acknowledged with personalized plaques in front of their tree. The project aims to join forces between residents and the government against CO2 emissions. This project will be incorporated via a user-friendly web interface, using data on a variety of trees and maps, also implementing AI technologies like computer vision and KNN, supplemented by chatbots and tree recommendation systems.

Hackathon in Nicosia, Cyprus

AI for the Common Good Hackathon in Nicosia, Cyprus
Dates: 17-19 November 2023
Partner Organisations: hack{cyprus}
Nicosia Municipality Multifunctional Foundation

Winning Idea: **Mama's Greens, Cyprus**
The Mama's Greens idea is a system that will provide hydroponic farmers with solutions for sustainable agricultural practices that will reduce their environmental impact while improving crop yields and quality. Their solution will address the problem of significant energy consumption by harnessing the power of real-time data, predictive analytics, and intelligent control systems to strike a delicate balance between energy conservation and crop optimization.

Hackathon in Milton Keynes, UK

AI for the Common Good Hackathon in Milton Keynes, UK
Dates: 1–2 December 2023
Partners: South Central Institute of Technology, Milton Keynes College

Winning idea: **Bristol Buddies, United Kingdom**
Bristol Buddies'ssolution improves the process of handling waste transfer notes, a critical part of dealing with waste from construction sites. By combining natural language processing and entity extraction, we process the natural language from handwritten documents and ensure all required fields are filled in. Short term, this will save massive time and costs to the business we were creating the solution for, and long term it will ensure better national regulation, less waste, more recycling and encourage competition to improve as well.

Hackathon in Budapest, Hungary, photo credit Mate Lakos

AI for the Common Good Hackathon in Budapest, Hungary
Dates: 7–9 December 2023
Partners: MOME Innovation Centre, the Budapest Foundation for Enterprise Promotion, the BKK - Centre for Budapest Transport and EIT Health Innovators

Winning idea: **Team CXD, Hungary**
Team CXD's solution (Rent It) offers a unique AI solution that suggests potential business opportunities and creates tailored 3D visualizations within investors' and owners' budgets.It answered the challenge brought by the Budapest Enterprise Agency and data was provided by Centre for Budapest Transport (BKK).

Challenge: Despite the potential benefits of the 15-minute city concept, thousands of street-front business premises in Budapest remain vacant, posing challenges for local communities and municipalities.

Quick win: Most of the countries had a fair gender balance among participation. n Hungary, 27 out of the 48 participants in the hackathon were female.

Hackathon in Athens, Greece

AI for the Common Good Hackathon in Athens, Greece
Dates: 15–17 December 2023
Partners: Microsoft Hellas, Athena Research Center, Athens University of Economics and Business, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Technopolis City of Athens, Athens Research Center General Secretariat for Research and Innovation, Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports

Winning idea: **Green Minds, Greece**
Green Minds' idea was Bumb it down, an AI pothole image detection app that utilises data to detect defects in roads and inform the user to avoid them and the city to fix them. The aim is to avoid accidents and related costs, reduce traffic in the city and increase fuel efficiency thus contributing to protecting the environment.

Blended preparation workshop on Youth-Policy Dialogue
February-March 2024

Winning teams of all countries were invited to a preparation training for the Youth-policy dialogue event that was scheduled to take place in Bristol, as part of the Study visit programme. Preparation started with an online meeting and was completed with a face-to-face workshop in Bristol, where participants worked in teams and devised their statements to discuss with the experts during the dialogue event.

The main objectives of the online preparation meeting were:
- to familiarise with the context and the programme of the study visit in Bristol
- to better understand the aim of the dialogue with the experts and their role
- to brainstorm in the topics of discussion for the dialogue event
- to prepare themselves for the onsite workshop in Bristol, where they would finalise their statements to the experts and representation teams
- work on the participants' inputs derived from the brainstorming session, define the pillars of conversation, design the face-to-face workshop

The main objectives of the face-to-face workshop in Bristol were:
- to feel comfortable to share their opinions and work together
- to give space to all of them in an equal way to share their opinions
- to prepare themselves as a team to present their outcomes in the youth policy dialoque event, in the conversation with the experts

The young leaders finally presented their statements/recommendations under the following pillars:

1. Sustainability and AI:
- discussing about the real environmental impact of AI as concerns energy consumption and carbon emissions
- using AI for solutions to help environment
- promoting sustainable practices in AI research and development

2. Accessibility and inclusivity of AI
- AI accessible to everyone
- Humanity diversity and its concepts developed over the centuries as a base for moving forward
- Future making of AI context-based notions of equity, diversity and inclusion

3. Legislation, data management/protection and AI

- focusing on creative sector and safety of intellectual rights/property
- challenges of making legislation, clear, fair and efficient
- regulations on AI data storage management

4. Holistic AI

- Finding a balance between making policies, building up the future and facing challenges
- Need of interdisciplinary research that examines the social, economic, psychological, and cultural impacts of AI to inform evidence-based policymaking
- AI usage awareness and accuracy of AI results

Study Trip to Bristol, UK
4-6 March 2024

The winning teams of the hackathons met in a study trip in Bristol – one of the leading sustainable cities in the UK. Bristol was the first British city to be named European Green Capital, an award that celebrates and promotes innovative responses to urban environmental challenges. During their trip, the winning teams had the opportunity to:

- Meet with each other and exchange on their experiences
- Work in teams during a workshop to prepare for their participation in the Dialogue event
- Visit relevant institutions and learn more about green initiatives and organisations with an ethical approach towards the environment and society
- Meet professionals and representatives of these organisations such as University of Bristol, Bristol City Council, SETsquared, Create Centre Bristol and ask them questions about their work.
- Engage in a Dialogue event with representatives of academia, industry and policymaking and present their statements on the future of AI.

Study Trip Agenda

Tuesday 5 March
- Create Centre - Bristol's flagship green venue- Bristol City Council
- Welcome & Icebreaking session for the team
- Youth-Policy Dialogue preparation workshop
- Discussion with green and ethical organisations hosted on Create Centre
- Presentation of the Bristol City Council Climate Change team
- Tour on Ecohome

Wednesday 6 March
- Hybrid Youth-Policy Dialogue at EngineShed, Station Approach
- Panel discussion with AI start-ups of SETsquared
- Study visit to Jean Golding Institute, Bristol University

What people thought of the study trip:

I just wanted to say another MASSIVE thank you for the organisation and facilitation for the AI for good study trip!! I have told so many people at work about it, and I think it was a great experience from both the social and academic/professional side!

- Alex, UK

Study trip video available at:

AI for the Common Good: a conversation between Young Leaders and Experts

On the 6 March 2024, we organised a hybrid Dialogue event aiming at exploring the potential of Artificial Intelligence for creating social value and the future use of it to enhance inclusivity and improve our lives.

A group of young leaders participated in a conversation with a panel of experts from industry and academia.

The panel was formed by **Nirav Ajmeri**, Senior Lecturer in Artificial Intelligence, School of Computer Science at the University of Bristol, **Emma Carmel**, Professor of Governance and Public Policy at the University of Bath, **Angeliki Dedopoulou**, Public Policy Manager for AI & Fintech at Meta and **Tim Santos**, Director of Product for AI Cloud Solutions at Graphcore.

The event was attended by representatives from the hackathon winners from the UK, Ireland, Cyprus, Greece and Hungary.

The session was moderated by **Karin Rudolph**, Founder of Collective Intelligence and the young participants were asked to voice and discuss their policy recommendations with the panel of experts.

This event took place on Wednesday 6th March 2024, at Engine Shed in Bristol, UK.

The Dialogue

The conversation revolved around the following five topics:

1. AI Legislation, data protection and data management.
- Intellectual property and data ownership
- Challenges in making legislation clear, fair and efficient
- Regulations on AI data storage management

2. Ethical considerations of AI
- Human control and decisions on how to apply AI technologies.
- Impact on the workplace
- AI as a tool for education for children and its uses in higher education.

3. Accessibility and inclusivity of AI
- AI accessible to everyone
- Context-based notions of equality, diversity and inclusion.
- How to maximise the opportunities AI can bring.

4. Sustainability and AI:
- The environmental impact of AI and the concerns about its energy consumption and carbon emissions
- Using AI to develop solutions to help the environment
- Promoting sustainable practices in AI research and development.

5. Holistic AI
- Multidisciplinary approach to AI and the need to understand the social, economic, psychological, and cultural impacts of AI.
- Evidence-based AI policy
- Context of use of AI, AI literacy and awareness.

Topic 1: . AI Legislation, data protection and data management.

The group represented by Alex from Cyprus sought to discuss issues concerning AI and legislation, governance and data management.

Alex, highlighted that their main points of discussion were around privacy and data protection, the problem of copyright, the right to be forgotten and the issues of data ownership.

Alex and the panellists discussed the importance of including everyone's voices in the discussions around regulations and the complexity of having a global regulatory regime for AI.

Topic 2: Ethical Considerations of AI

Nic, from Ireland, proposed the topic of Ethics in AI and the importance of having ethical considerations when deploying AI.

The group questions were framed concerning two main areas; academia/ education and industry.

Regarding the first area, the group suggested starting by questioning how ethical it is to introduce AI as a tool in primary school, as this can be a powerful tool for education, but it can also hinder the natural social learning progression.

The other area of discussion was AI as a tool in Industry and its impact on workers and the modern workforce and the balance between risks and opportunities in relation to the human input and output of AI.

Topic 3: Accessibility and inclusivity in AI

Floris, from Cyprus, wanted to discuss the inclusion of people and the development of AI models that are accessible.

He mentioned the importance of offering a positive light, as AI can have a positive impact on applications such as AI-assisted technologies, speech recognition and voice assistants.

He added that AI can make education more inclusive and personalised. Not everyone has the same level of education and AI can help to close that gap.

How do we ensure the accessibility and inclusivity of AI?

He mentioned affordability as a factor and the need to make these tools accessible to third-world countries.

Also when developing these tools, how do we ensure these systems don't have our biases and stereotypes?

Topic 4: AI and Sustainability

Omar from the UK, opened up the discussion by asking how AI can help to protect the environment.

His group discussed the use of AI in the context of recycling and he gave an example of the use of AI to improve the recycling process.
Another important point in the discussion about sustainability is the cost of hardware and the energy they consume.

Topic 5: Holistic AI.

Art, from Ireland, presented the topic of Holistic AI, and the overarching view of how AI has been developed as a whole.

AI has been used for great uses like in a medical context, and other non-relevant uses.

His question was framed around the focus on developing AI in the future and the potential of developing AI systems for frivolous purposes.

Another issue mentioned was accuracy in the case of chat Chat GPT if there is a case when the use of AI should be limited.

Another area is the importance of facilitating a multidisciplinary approach to AI, to foster collaboration and avoid silos.

Multidisciplinary research can also help with policy making as sometimes people don't fully understand what they are talking about.

What people said about the Youth Policy Dialogue event:

I thoroughly enjoyed the panel discussions with the AI experts, and being given the opportunity to chat with them was a great experience. Being able to see exactly how AI can improve our world was inspiring and I made many good connections and friends from the trip.

- Alex, UK

Video of Youth Policy Dialogue event avaliable at:

Artificial Intelligence for the Common Good in numbers

5
countries

335
applicants

180
participants in hackathons

More than

40
mentors, trainers and jury members

30
partner organisations from Europe and the UK