Reflections on AI
Q&A with
Caitlin Corrigan

"Governing AI use is a complex problem, that requires technical, but even more so policy related solutions."

The TUM IEAI had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Caitlin Corrigan, the Executive Director for the IEAI at the Technical University of Munich. She holds a PhD in Public and International Affairs from the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Corrigan's research interests include good governance, sustainable development and corporate social responsibility, particularly in developing country settings.

1. What motivates you in terms of the topic of AI ethics? And how do you see your role as Executive Director at the IEAI?

I came to this position from a background of public policy and international development with a focus on good governance. Very different from a lot of the people that I am now working around. But the application of my experience, to the topic of the responsible use and development of AI, was pretty immediately clear to me. Governing AI use is a complex problem that requires technical, but even more so policy related solutions. This really is what has drawn me into the topic. How can we approach these complex and changing environments in effective ways? Moreover, how does AI interact with some of the most pressing social and policy related issues of today, such as sustainability, equality and human rights as well as workplace issues? All these things come into play and have really interacted with issues I have dealt with before in my past experience.
Through my work as the Executive Director at the IEAI, my role is to facilitate research

exactly on these topics and create a growing awareness of the importance of thinking about AI ethics and the responsible use of AI. I have always been interested in applied research and how to bridge the gap between academic research and policy implementation. With our amazing IEAI team, I get to focus on just that in a variety of ways. Increasing partnerships with AI developers and policy practitioners to ensure we are not operating in a bubble. Developing new research project ideas that are relevant to questions society is facing right now. Also bringing together researchers and academics from around the world to make sure we are supporting global and holistic approaches to these important topics.

2. The IEAI kicked off in October 2019. As we are coming to our second year anniversary, what are your priorities for the IEAI next year?

It is hard to believe that two years ago the IEAI did not exist. We have done so much: with a growing staff, we have 14 running projects, we have multiple new networks and partners, we have a variety of IEAI produced content on the topics of AI ethics and I am really proud of our whole staff and everyone who has worked with us along the way. It has been two amazing years.
The importance of our work is also underlined by the growing number of other institutes around the world that we are seeing working on this topic. It seems I discover a new one every day that is doing

interesting work. One of my major goals in the coming year is to keep improving our partnerships with these institutes, so that we can build off of each other's work in order to make as much progress as possible in this ever growing field. This should be really capitalized upon rather than operating in our own silos. So working together is really important, especially in such a new discipline.

Moreover, a second thing I want to draw on, is our IEAI project leaders and researchers to strengthen our community and diversity at the Technical University of Munich (TUM) as well. TUM is doing so much research on this topic and it is vital to ensure that those research results are shared among those working at TUM, so we can collaborate better and also make it available to the public and stakeholders that can utilize them. The IEAI is in a perfect position to play this strong role and I hope to continue to strengthen our internal relationships to this end, as well as continue building our internal partnerships.

Finally, the results of our initial projects will be coming out in the next year and our goal is to translate this research findings into practice. This is going to be increasingly relevant to us as the projects really come to full circle. To that end, I want to prioritize expanding our collaborations with non-academic partners in industry, government and civil society. We have already had some great experiences with this over the past year. We have worked with partners like Celonis, Munich Re, IBM and we are expanding our connections with organizations like the Inter-American Development Bank, UNESCO and the GIZ. So lots of different types of partners that can benefit from a collaboration with us. There is a lot of potential and interest in this respect.

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

I strongly believe that independent academic research has a vital role to play in designing AI-enabled technologies, which have the potential to truly make a positive impact on society. University-based research, in particular, has access to the expertise and the time to produce meaningful and high-quality results as well as inform about the complex challenges we face in the field of AI today. With the IEAI, we now also have the resources to do such research in a really meaningful way.

Furthermore, what much of the news about tech companies and their approaches to AI ethics this year has shown us, is that AI ethics is not something that can be done completely in-house or completely behind closed doors. It requires public opinion, it requires good governance and it requires information based on independent and rigorous research to support decision making, whether that being government or companies themselves. This final component I believe can best be carried out by academic and research institutions and again is where the IEAI, and hopefully more interdisciplinary groups can play a facilitating role.

4. Why is this interdisciplinary approach so important when it comes to AI Ethics?

As I mentioned, I was drawn to this work and this job in part because this topic represents a lot of what I have seen throughout my work on good governance. It takes many stakeholders and many perspectives to effectively approach complex problems and the development. The use of AI is no different than a lot of the problems we have seen around the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us more clearly than anything in recent memory,

the limits of what things like medicine and technology can do (in the absence of thinking about the social structures and policy mechanism), in which they are placed that will allow medical or technological efforts to be effective.

With AI, it is the same case. The most important new technological tools with the greatest benefit to human-kind will remain ineffective if we do not think about the social and political structures and environments in which they have to operate. At the other end of the spectrum, we have to think about how a seemingly benign tool may have negative implications for overlooked populations or generations to come. So, involving researchers and stakeholder from several disciplines and several sectors can allow research or development teams to take these factors into account early on in order to increase the effectiveness and hopefully reduce any harms.

5. The IEAI supports and participates in several networks related to AI ethics, such as the Global AI Ethics Consortium (GAIEC) and the Responsible AI Network Africa (RAIN-Africa). What is the role of these networks? What can they offer?

I am very excited about both of the networks we have helped to develop since we launched in 2019. They are both expanding in different ways every day. The enthusiasm of the members really shows the need for such networks. In the field of AI ethics this brings people from very different backgrounds together: from social sciences, ethics, philosophy, computer science and one of the hurdles to expand the research on this topic is just not knowing who else is working on it and where, especially when they spread accross so many different fields. So that is why these networks have been particularly valuable in this field for us as well.

Both the Global AI Ethics Consortium (GAIEC) and Responsible AI Network Africa (RAIN-Africa) are essentially about bringing together researchers who are working on similar topics in order for them to work together, rather than operating in silos. We aim to highlight the work of these researchers and are doing so through our events, our research repositories that we have started building, as well as through us at the IEAI being able to connect directly to members. Thus allowing us to build new projects with them and reach a wider audience - hopefully allowing them to reach a wider audience as well. For instance, with the Global AI Ethics Consortium we have launched a free online course on AI Ethics, with a focus on global perspectives. This not only gives our consortium members a platform to share their cutting edge research they have been working on, but it opens up the AI ethics to a whole new set of people that may have not have discovered it yet otherwise. Because of RAIN-Africa, the IEAI is now involved into a research project with our RAIN-Africa partners in Senegal. Through this we have connected our researchers and their researchers from totally different backgrounds (both in terms of geography and discipline) to work together on a common project. These are just some of the more tangible examples these networks already have created.

6. The Responsible AI Forum will be held on 6–8 December 2021 in Munich. What are the top three reasons someone should attend?

After a long period of virtual events, we are very excited to have invited over 20 experts and expect over 150 participants from all around the world. This includes researchers, students, policymakers, industry representatives, to meet and discuss the most relevant and pressing

issues related to the responsible use of AI. This will be a 3-day international conference for all players in the field of AI - we welcome everyone. Our vision with this conference is to strike a balance between a forum that is about deep academic exchange with a conference that it is about practice-based AI applications and insights to try to bring those two sides together. Often these two sides work in parallel and we lose the opportunity to learn first-hand from each other. So the Responsible AI Forum is our effort to bring research and practice together in an effective and hopefully very enjoyable way.

The Responsible AI Forum is also about discussing and networking. It is also important in promoting a sustainable, inclusive and comprehensive framework for the use of AI to deliver global benefit. So, if I had to choose three reasons for someone to attend: to catch up with the most recent developments in the field of responsible AI, to dive deeper into cutting-edge topics with our panelists and presenters through interactive sessions and to network with significant and international experts from academia, industry, government and civil society. After all, nothing beats personal interaction and this is something we have been missing over the past year! Why miss an opportunity to come to Munich and enjoy the Advent season and a real Bavarian dinner event that we will be hosting? I am very personally excited about seeing everyone and attending what promises to be a diverse and informative set of sessions.

Meet the expert

Dr. Caitlin Corrigan

As the Executive Director for the IEAI, Dr. Corrigan is responsible for the development and coordination of all IEAI research and administrative activities. Additionally, she works closely with the IEAI Director to craft the IEAI's agenda, develop strategic partnerships for the institute and to enhance our academic network. She has over ten years of experience in designing and implementing research and data collection, developing and managing research projects and coordinating funding proposals. She has also conducted field-based research in Southern Africa with a focus on CSR, natural resource management and community development. Dr. Corrigan has worked as a consultant for local and international NGOs though the Research Group for Sustainable Impacts (RG-SI), producing data collection and evaluation systems for organizations, conducting statistical data analysis and generating policy relevant research and reports.