



Sacro Convento Assisi
Basilica di San Francesco

AI ASSISI ACT

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In January 2024, the Umbria Journalists' Association engaged the friars of the Sacred Convent of Saint Francis in Assisi and, in the following months, other partners, to gain more extensive information and knowledge and to ponder together, hence from a multidisciplinary perspective, on Artificial Intelligence (AI) from the point of view of personal freedom and responsibility (ethics) in the field of communication. To this end, workshops and seminars were held, sometimes for small groups, at other times participation was open to a larger number of people (below is a list of all those who participated in various capacities and offered their professional and personal contribution), assessments and exchanges of views with experts (lastly, prof. Paolo Benanti, currently, at the time of writing, President of the AI Commission for Information of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic), which progressively led to drawing up a statement of priorities and goals. Its intention is to be a shared, hence authoritative foundation to be able to ethically – i.e. responsibly – 'live' in the AI era, in the field of information and communication, in order to search for the truth of the facts and share it with the public opinion.

Indeed, we realise that this issue gives rise to a host of other issues – first and foremost, the quality and the very survival of democratic freedom in our societies.

The declaration below has the symbolic and evocative title of "AI Assisi Act", and it was officially presented on 15 September 2024, on the last day of Cortile di Francesco, the cultural event promoted by the friars of the Sacred Convent of Saint Francis in Assisi.

Along with publication in Italian, the text is also shared in French, English, Spanish, German, Japanese, and Chinese.

*The following people took part in the reflection that led to drawing up the "AI Assisi Act", in alphabetical order: **Luca Angelini**, Director, Umbria Digital Innovation Hub; **Carlo Bartoli**, President, Journalists' Association; **Paolo Benanti**, President of the AI Commission for Information of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the Italian Republic; **Giovanni Caprara**, President, UGIS Union of Italian Scientific Journalists and Scientific Columnist, Corriere della Sera; **Giulio Cesareo**, Director, Communication Office, Sacred Convent of Assisi; **Andrea Cova**, Editor and Editorial Coordinator of the 'San Francesco patrono d'Italia' magazine; **Francesca D'Alessandro**, Professor of Italian Literature, Italian for Communication and History of Criticism at the Catholic University of Milan and Brescia; **Raffaele Federici**, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, University of Perugia; **Luca Ferrucci**, Department of Economics, University of Perugia; **Cosimo Lorusso**, President of the Journalists' Association of Umbria; **Mario Marcellini**, Director, Coris (Department of Communication and Social Research), La Sapienza University, Full Professor in Sociology of Cultural and Communicative Processes and Full Member of the Higher Council of Communications; **Giampaolo Marchini**, President of the Journalists' Association of Tuscany; **Massimo Mercati**, CEO, Aboca; **Donatella Miliani**, journalist; **Maurizio Oliviero**, Dean of the University of Perugia; **Giovanni Parapini**, Director, Rai Umbria, **Norberto Patrignani**, Professor of Computer Ethics, Politecnico of Turin; **Alessandro Picchiarelli**, Priest and teacher; **Silvestro Ramunno**, President of the Journalists' Association of Emilia-Romagna; **Andrea Rossi**, journalist; **Giuliana Scorsoni**, representative of the Bar Association of Terni; **Sergio Sottani**, Attorney General, Court of Appeal of Perugia; **Riccardo Stefanelli**, Chief Executive Officer, Brunello Cucinelli; **Barbara Strappato**, Director of the First Division of the Postal and Communications Police Service.*

AI ASSISI ACT

We share the belief that

- The human person – any person, regardless of class, colour, gender, or culture – has infinite dignity and must be protected and supported at all costs.
- Progress is part of humanity, of being men and women: we are always open to new possibilities, a constant stimulus for the development and personal and social liberation of all human beings.
- True progress, the one worthy of the name, is not a simple numerical indicator nor the increase in profit for the few – true progress is that which allows us, as one humanity, to nurture our great abilities and energies in a freer, more conscious and responsible way, so that ever larger groups of men and women can live in accordance with their own beliefs, inclinations and desires, within the framework of human rights, the common good and justice. A progress based on ‘responsible innovation’, focusing on the care for ecosystems and human beings rather than on maximising profits.
- AI is part of this progress, the fruit of human creativity and intelligence, and like all that is human it is always ambivalent, holding both opportunities and contradictions, which are inherent to the human condition and to every person’s heart. That is precisely why we need to reflect and ponder on this tool, so that it is ever more at the service of everyone’s life and holistic development, without any distinction and/or abuse. A first implication for the world of information concerns the very term ‘AI’: it is misleading and contributes to the phenomenon of anthropomorphisation of these technologies. It would be more precise to call them ‘machines trained with (a lot of) data’, machines where language is disconnected from thought (a good practice should be to avoid the use of ‘I’ by the machine in its answers).
- Truth is the essential and imperative content of human communication. The purpose of information – in its many aspects – can never disregard a sincere, hence also fallible, search for and honest conveyance of the truth, as it is known and understood. From this point of view, AI can be an unparalleled tool in increasing knowledge and providing increasingly reliable data for understanding and interpreting them within the context of a sincere search for truth, which is and will remain a typically human possibility and duty that can never be entrusted to technology.
- Profit is not the highest human value, nor can it be considered a sort of totem which every other value, end or project may be subjected to. The only absolute is the value of the human person. Therefore, profit, even if legitimate and derived from one’s own work and commitment, cannot be an absolute goal or assume greater importance than human rights and the protection of personal dignity.

We also understand that

- AI has, and will have, a very significant impact on the way we conduct our existence and on the way we organise and carry out work to support ourselves in everyday life, on the exercise of democracy and the management of power, as well as on the formation of personal consciences and beliefs, and of communities and nations.
- AI is man-made, and for this very reason it is the harbinger of great hope, but at the same time it shares human fallibility and, above all, it is constantly at risk of being 'tainted' by the pursuit of power and wealth at all costs by some to the detriment of others.
- Like all forms of progress and advancement in the history of humanity, also AI will engender opportunities, hopes, conflicts, resistance and unease. A time of *krisis* is opening up before us (in the sense of choices, risks and opportunities).
- AI is neither a fatality or a fortuitous event: it is the work of man and must be attributed back to man. It must be regulated, guided and developed by man, also in its automatic and generative components and 'skills'.

Indeed, we condemn

- The exploitation of male and female workers who are employed around the world to 'upload' data into AI, without which it is useless and inefficient.
- The consumption of huge energy, water and environmental resources to make AI 'live', without taking responsibility for developing a more environmentally-sustainable approach to its operation.
- Any AI use, programming, or setup that authorises, permits, or even makes possible, desirable, or tolerable its operation or use against human beings, be they enemies, criminals, political or economic adversaries, vulnerable people, or those who, for any other reason, are subject to discrimination. With AI, it becomes easy to spread:
 - bad information (true, actual information that is typically spread out of context),
 - misinformation (false and misleading information, created and spread without the explicit intention to deceive, unfortunately perceived and forwarded as if it were true),
 - dis-information (false information, spread with the explicit intention of deceiving people, polarising opinion in groups that do not communicate, without intermediate channels, up to the extreme consequences),just to mention some harmful uses for the community that should be avoided thanks to professional ethics and shared norms.

- The concentration of AI knowledge and the ensuing power in very few High Tech Companies and autocratic systems, that is, in the hands of few individuals. The exponential increase in the power given by AI technology must be offset with adequate democratic control instruments.

Therefore, we hope for

- AI to be a technological tool that – like others before it in the history of humanity – frees individuals and communities from exhausting, technical, repetitive, dehumanising and alienating tasks so that an ever-increasing number of people can devote themselves to all that is typically human: the spiritual search for truth, goodness and beauty – on a religious and non-religious level –, for justice and solidarity, growth in humanity through learning, culture, research and interpersonal relationships, in respect and freedom, care for the common Home and the pursuit of knowledge that increasingly frees human life from every form of submission and oppression. All that in the awareness that artificial intelligence is a tool of extremely high technological value that can never, nor should ever, replace the human person in the activities in which it can be used, especially in the most significant ones, such as information.
- AI to be placed transparently at the service of the communication of truth, goodness, and beauty, in the awareness that all authentic communication is only between human beings and by human beings.
- The statistical knowledge provided by AI – which concerns the past – to be a basis for human creativity, for more informed choices in designing and planning for a dignified, free, just and peaceful future for all. For example, AI should be a ‘friendly’ and ‘open’ technology (in the data used to train it, in the codes, etc.) in order to reduce to the minimum the risks of incorporating biases and stereotypes into the resulting models. In AI systems, the quality of the data used in the training stage is essential.

We want

- To promote training in the knowledge and use of AI-related technologies in various work skills and, specifically, in the field of communication and transmission of information and its correct interpretation, so that it is at the service of the protection of human dignity.
- To entreat and remind everyone, and in particular those who are serving the community in the ministry of politics, of their responsibility and duty – at this time of our history affected by technology – not to neglect but promote education, especially of the younger generations, in the world of art, the exercise of creativity, interpersonal communication.

We undertake

- To act consistently with these intentions of ours through permanent and collective work, open to the contributions of those who share the vision and the responsibility towards a future of opportunities and potential risks.
- To delve deeper into the implications for the world of information and communication with a special focus on using AI wisely. Machines can provide large amounts of data and help visualise interesting correlations (extracting information from data), which is exactly why the availability of 'open data' is key in a democratic society. Among the many examples of use we can mention instant translation into different languages, improved accessibility by converting text into audio, the creation of summaries from long texts, etc.).
- To ensure the collaboration of AI experts with a strong awareness of ethical issues – for example, those who adopt the ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct – because technology is not neutral, and technology and society shape each other;
- To help people tell the difference between a mere correlation of data and a more important cause-and-effect relationship.
- To adequately inform people whenever they are accessing content created with the aid of AI. In a world flooded with information, the time, attention and trust of readers are the most precious resources, therefore it becomes essential to inform them of any connections with third parties, asking for their explicit consent to the automatic display of content. In the future, people will increasingly use machines precisely to better allocate their time and attention.
- To supervise the outputs provided by machines since they may contain errors.
- To appreciate and promote the professional ethics of people working in communication, who take responsibility for their work, who operate with the utmost transparency by citing sources.
- To appreciate and promote the role of professional journalism, which will become even more important because it provides different perspectives on events, which differ from those of the dominant power and for this reason often pay the price.

- To build a reputation. An aspect that cannot be 'automated' is the patient building of trust between humans, based on experience, history and a value system.
- To search for the sources, providing everyone with tools for direct knowledge (think of investigative journalism for the public interest).
- To combine ethical issues with the highest standards of journalism, avoiding the complete handover to technologies, thus preventing the greatest risk for professions: deskilling.