

Anchoring the Ethics of Edtech in Higher Education

Four EU perspectives

Symposium

ETH-TECH Partnership

Discussant: Maria Ranieri

Chairperson: Juliana E. Raffaghelli, University of Padova

Technological Evolution and the Geopolitical situation of Europe

Ethics as a response?

GDPR (2016)
Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI (2019)
Ethical Guidelines on AI and Data in
Education (2022)
AI-ACT (2024)



EUROPEAN DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND DATA SOVEREIGNTY



EIT (2020)

<https://www.eitdigital.eu/fileadmin/2022/ecosystem/makers-shapers/reports/EIT-Digital-Data-Sovereignty-Summary-Report.pdf>



GENERATIVE AI: EUROPE'S QUEST FOR REGULATION AND INDUSTRY LEADERSHIP



AiNed

EIT (2025)

https://www.eitdigital.eu/fileadmin/2024/ecosystem/downloads/EIT-Digital_AiNed_Generative-AI-Report-web.pdf

Ethical Guidelines on the use of AI and Data in ED (2022)

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d81a0d54-5348-11ed-92ed-01aa75ed71a1/>

- 1  **Human Agency and Oversight**
- 2  **Transparency**
- 3  **Diversity, non-Discrimination and Fairness**
- 4  **Societal and Environmental Wellbeing**
- 5  **Privacy and Data Governance**
- 6  **Technical Robustness and Safety**
- 7  **Accountability**

Correlated documents: High Level Expert Group on Trustworthy AI (2019), DigCXomp 2.2. (2022) EU AI Act (2024)



Ethics as a *patch*?

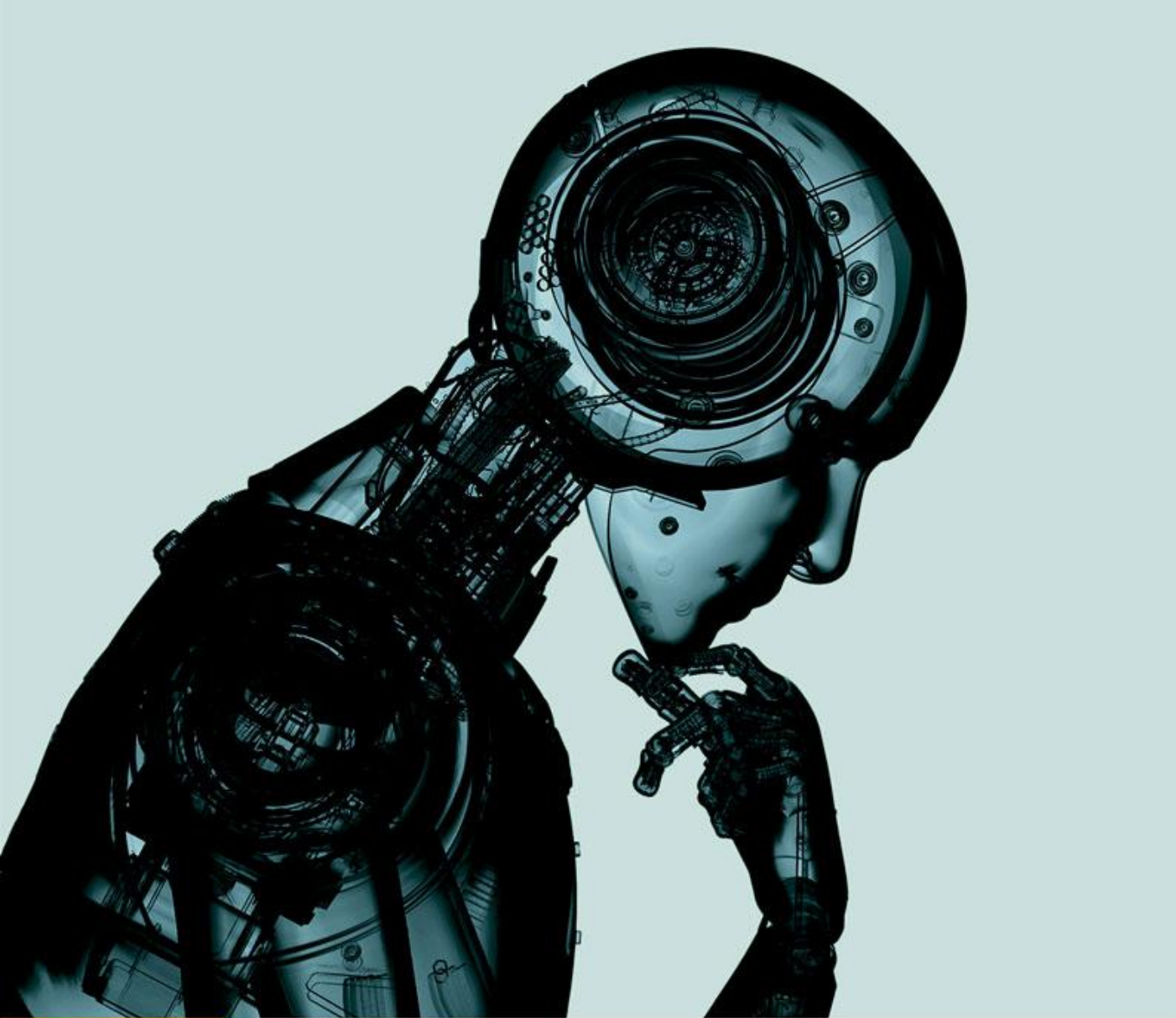


A competitive digital Europe that is inclusive, fair and sustainable

We embody the future of innovation by mobilizing a pan-European multi-stakeholder open-innovation ecosystem of top European corporations, SMEs, startups, universities and research institutes, where students, researchers, engineers, business developers and investors address the technology, talent, skills, business and capital needs of digital entrepreneurship.

Futures work as a site of (critical) engagement (Ross, 2022)

Hopes and concerns about the role of digital technologies in personalisation, massification, access and collaboration have been playing out at all levels of formal and informal learning.



Etica delle macchine

Dilemmi morali per robotica e intelligenza artificiale

Guglielmo Tamburrini

Carocci editore  Quality Paperbacks

What's the problem with universal recommendations?

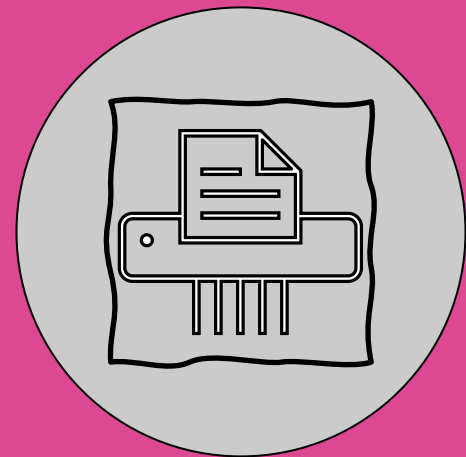
- Universal guidelines vs...
 - The dilemmas of situated human activity
 - Open contradiction (e.g.: openness or transparency vs. privacy)
 - Abstraction, elusiveness (e.g.: check for a system algorithmic biases)
- If it's not an ethics of **values** (*guidelines*) or an ethics of **consequences/impact** (*consequentialism*), shall we go for an **ethics of virtues** (*deontology*)?

...The educator and the problem of supererogation

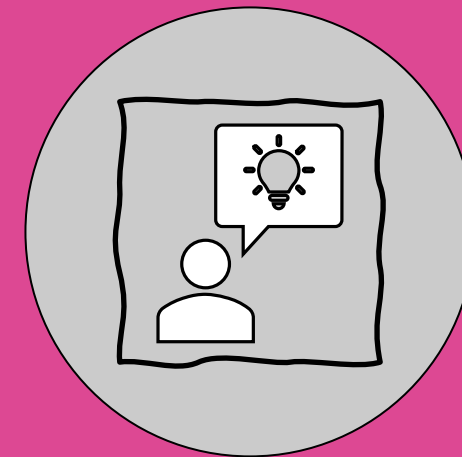
Our journey

Anchoring the ethics of educational technology (AI and data) usage in the Education Practice

ETHTECH



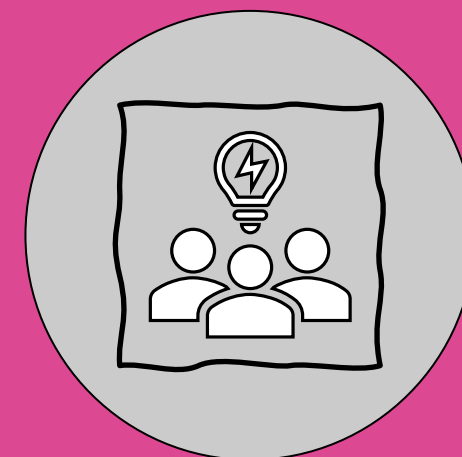
Discourse analysis of **3204** EU Erasmus+ projects on educational technology



Conceptual Brainstorming and «participatory thematic analysis» (**121 original ideas**)



Syllabi analysis (**nearly 500 syllabi**): educational technology courses delivered within pre-service teachers' training in Spain, Italy, Romania, Germany



Sessions (**9**) with teachers' educators / professors to rethink discourses about the ethics of educational technology

SPOILER ALERT!

Instrumental use and teaching of educational technologies - Little presence of ethics' debate - Ethics as compliance

Perspectives on EdTEch Ethics

What is the problem with
recommendations?

Juliana E. Raffaghelli, University of Padova, **Italy**

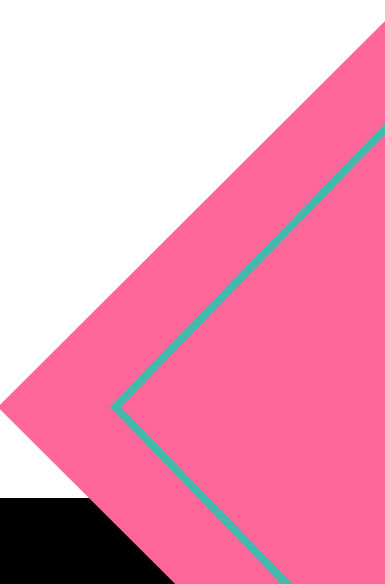
Sigrid Hartong, Helmut-Schmidt University, **Germany**

Pablo Rivera-Vargas, University of Barcelona, **Spain**

Oana Negru-Subtirica, University Babes-Bolyai, **Romania**

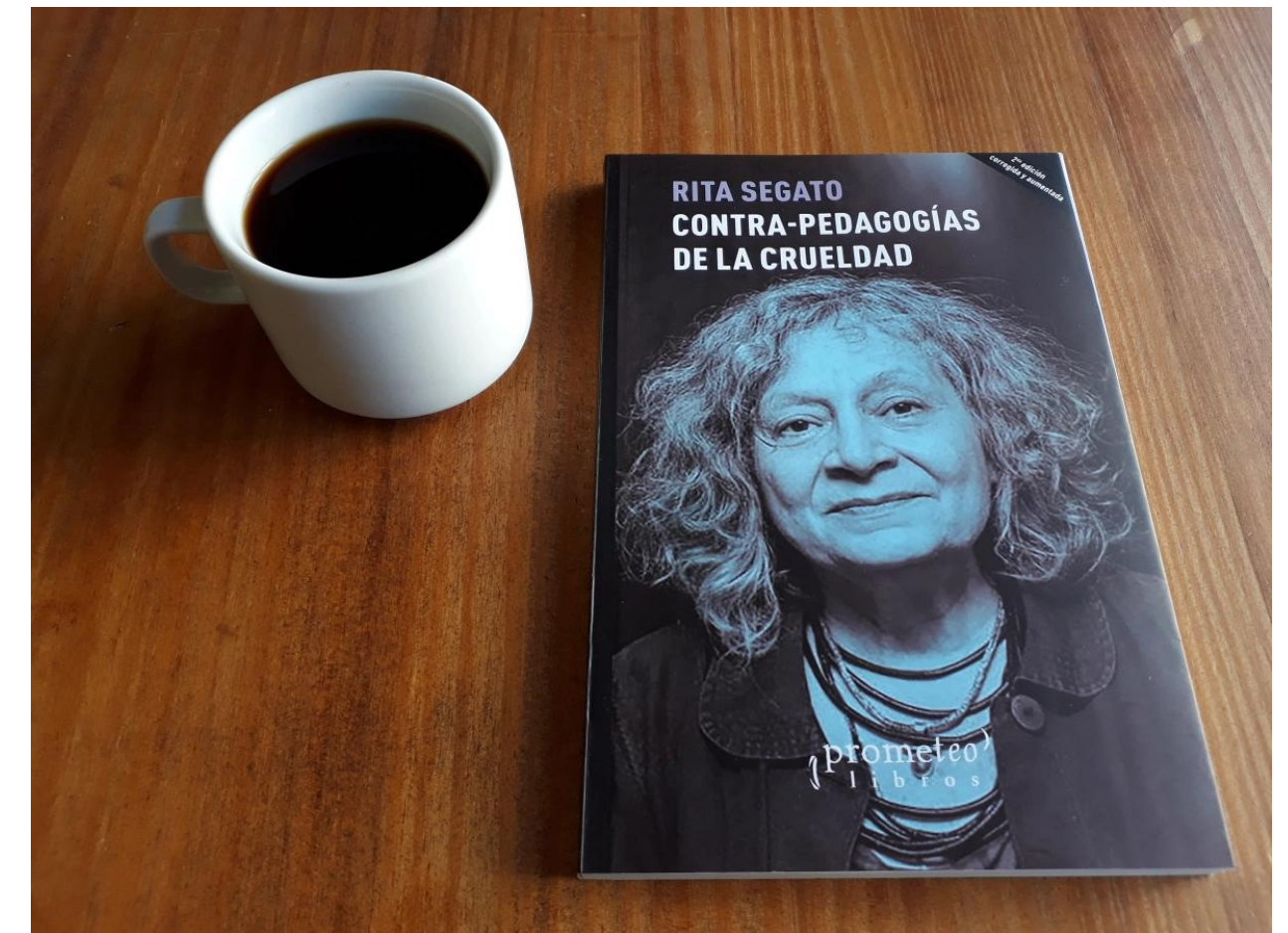


Problem

- Concerns about AI social impact, sustainability in education (Rivera-Vargas, 2023; Selwyn, 2023; Williamson, 2023).
 - Ethical guidelines are often portrayed as “complementary” tools to mitigate technological risks, yet their transformative potential remains limited (Green, 2021).
 - Operationalizing ethics models (80) into meaningful educational practices as ambiguous and challenging (Morley et al., 2023).
- 

Supererogation & The pedagogy of cruelty

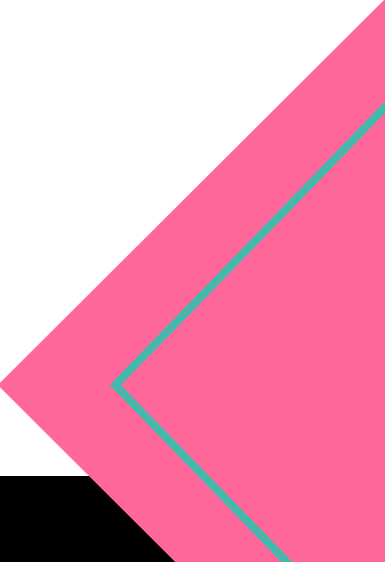
When I speak of a pedagogy of cruelty, I am referring to something very precise, such as the capture of something that flowed errantly and unpredictably, such as life, to install there the inertia and sterility of the thing, measurable, saleable, purchasable and obsolescent, as is convenient for consumption in this apocalyptic phase of capital (Segato, 2018, p.11).



Is asking the individual to comply with the ethical aspect part of the cruelty-show?



Methodological Approach

- **Conceptual debate** about *“perspectives on the ethics of AI and data in education”*
 - *Participatory thematic analysis*
 - Three sessions (January 2025)
 - Visual representation (February 2025)
 - **Critique of the ethics of AI and data as a conceptual deconstruction from three perspectives January-June 2025**
 - Postdigital critique
 - Topological critique
 - Epistemic justice critique
- 

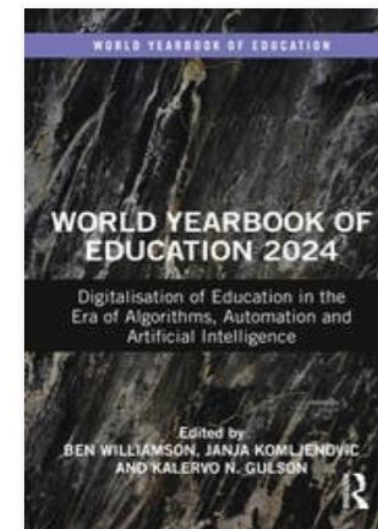
A postdigital critique

Our *passion* to produce set of skills and competences meet...

The politics of digital literacy frameworks and their liaison with EdTech Myths (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2024)
Dealing with the liminality of AI and technology (postdigital stance)

Is AI literacy teachable? Is the ethics of AI teachable?

(BUT...Pay attention to the critique of critique!)



Chapter

Digital literacies as a 'soft power' of educational governance

By [Luci Pangrazio](#) , [Julian Sefton-Green](#) 

Book [World Yearbook of Education 2024](#)

The Errors of Thamus: An Analysis of Technology Critique

Ellen Rose
University of New Brunswick

The anti-utopian technology critique of Ellul, Postman, and other important social analysts has been the primary mode of critical response to technological developments since the 1950s. However, this mode of technology critique has had a disappointingly small effect on the way we, as a society, receive technology. Rather than attribute this failure to the negativity of the anti-utopian perspective, this article suggests that there are other important and largely overlooked factors at work—in particular, the critics' inability to speak about technology in a way that relates to us as

For your invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it, through lack of practice at using their memory, as through reliance on writing they are reminded from outside by alien marks, not from inside, themselves by themselves: you have discovered an elixir not of memory but of reminding. To your students, you give an appearance of wisdom, not the reality of it; having heard much, in the absence of teaching, they will appear to know much when for the most part they know nothing, and they

A topological critique

- Ethics applied to a private platform might work perfectly protecting PRIVACY, being more ROBUST with regard to an open source SW.
- BUT the digital infrastructure will not be aligned with digital sovereignty.
- Applied captology will limit users' agency (Floridi, 2024).
- The materiality of the digital, data and AI is invisibilised

Should we understand data infrastructures behind AI as first, ethical choice?

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Hypersuasion – On AI's Persuasive Power and How to Deal with It

Editor Letter | Published: 17 May 2024
Volume 37, article number 64, (2024) [Cite this article](#)

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Floridi Luciano ✉

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Persuasion (including manipulation and nudge) is the counterpart of *coercion*; both are forms of *control*, and hence belong to the art of politics, understood as the (preferably legitimate) control of people's behaviours (Floridi, 2020). Let me

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Home > Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research > Article

The Topologies of Data Practices: A Methodological Introduction

Original | [Open access](#) | Published: 15 January 2021
Volume 10, pages 67–84, (2021) [Cite this article](#)

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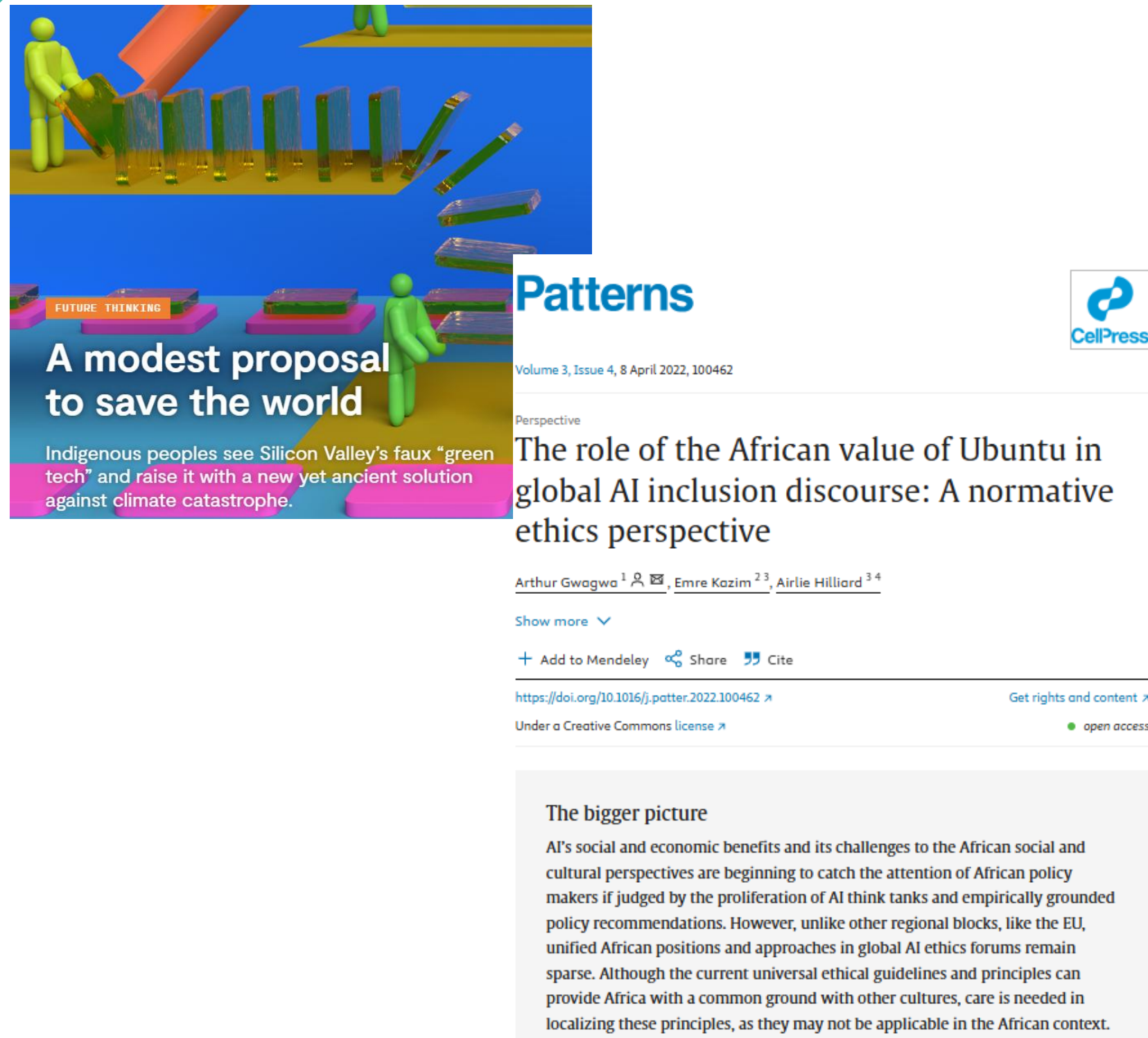
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Mathias Decuypere ✉

An epistemic justice critique

- The values behind AI ethical frameworks in education are based on «universal values».
- In time, these values refer to the Western philosophical debates and background.
- Also, edu research is prevalently driven by Global North academics.

Should we explore other values i.e. the Ubuntu/African (self through others, Gwawa et al., 2022) view of technology, or the tequiologias (Aguilar, 2020), to rethink the edtech ethics?

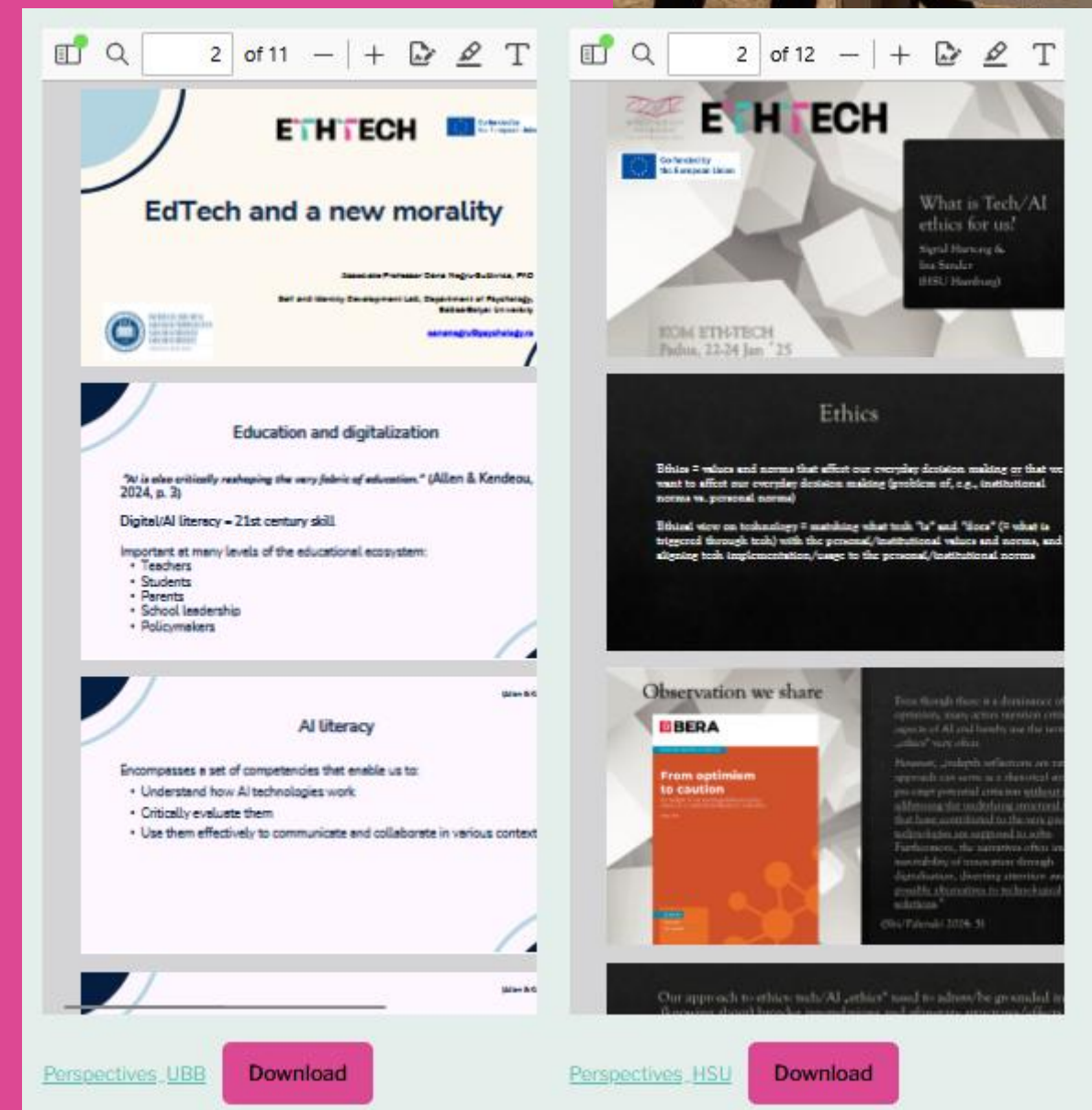
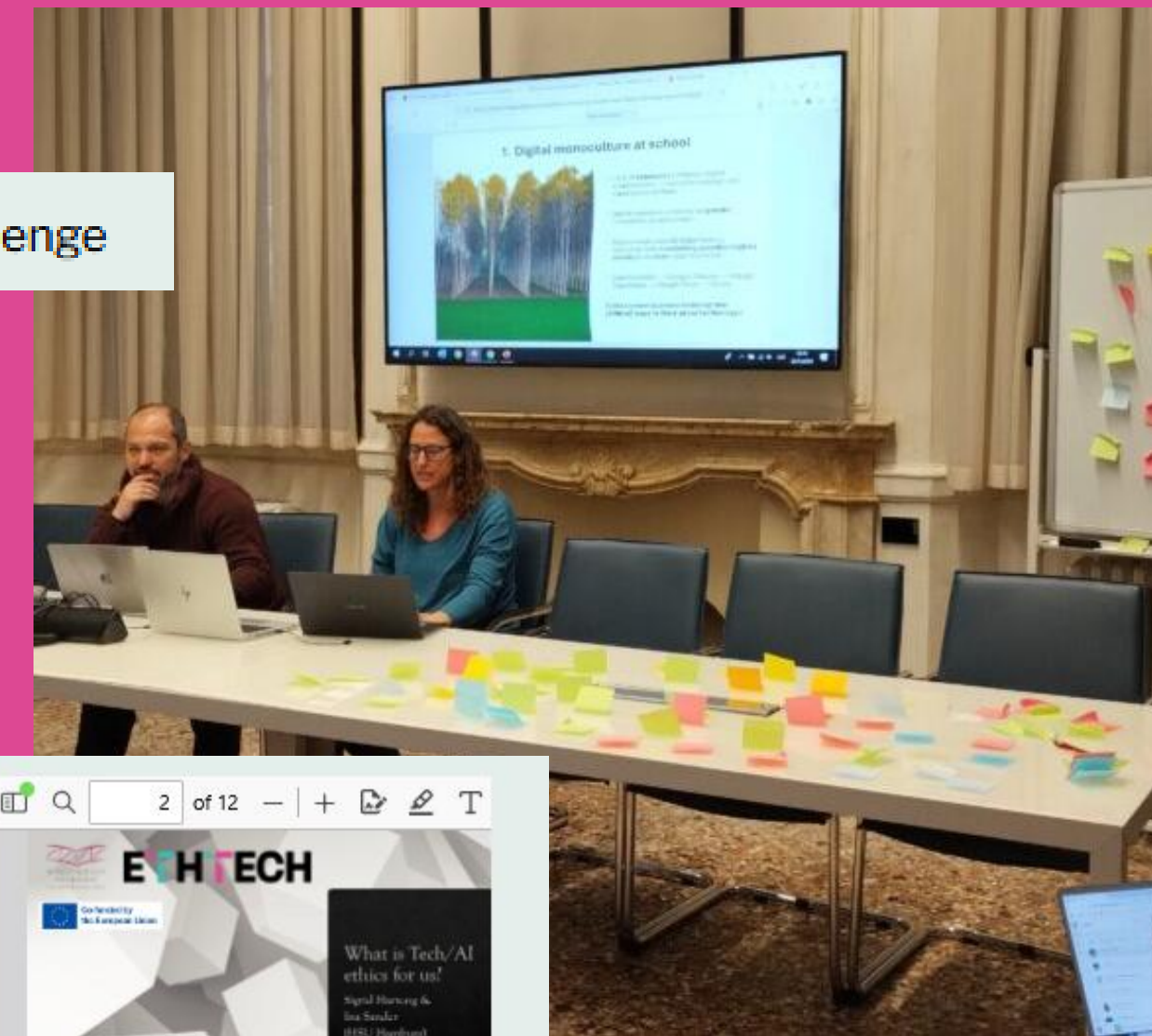


Participatory Thematic Analysis

- We applied transnational and interdisciplinary lenses, by collecting the four national perspectives; brainstorming about each participants' "wiring" to each perspective
- The first day, we "framed" the problem, through
 - Four presentations
 - Q&A space
 - "Notes taking" about each presentation

121 ideas were collected out of this first phase

Day 1: Framing the Challenge



Participatory Thematic Analysis

- The second day we discussed ethics within “practices”, giving continuity to the debate about the several applied interpretations of ethics in future teachers and educators’ training.
- The ideas collected where thematically disposed by two researchers and left in a shared space for the participants to take a look at them.

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Day 2: Mapping Ethics in Practice



<https://eth-tech.eu/rethinking-ethics/>

Participatory Thematic Analysis

ETHTECH

- The third day, through a collective session, eight participants engaged in a common interpretation and re-categorisation of the key ideas collected, re-arranging them into three main topics:
 - Problems (18 ideas);
 - Methods to approach problems (15 ideas)
 - Future desirable scenarios (17 ideas).

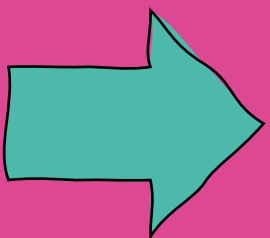
Day 3: **Envisioning Ethical Futures**

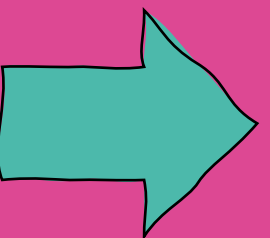
The final day was dedicated to solutions. Building on their discussions, the group sketched out a framework that could move beyond static ethical principles and into dynamic, context-sensitive practices. Through our participatory brainstorming, we imagined how educators and students could engage in an ethics of inquiry.



Participatory Thematic Analysis

ETHTECH

- The dynamic culminated in a **final synthesis**, achieving:
 - A semantic map based on **6 connected problems**.
 - **One main perspective** on ethics within this context
- 
- We subsequently delineated:
 - 6 terms as methods and instruments to explore ethics within the ETH-TECH space,
 - and 4 Future Scenarios we'd like to build.
 - We also discussed the idea that ethics cannot be delivered through “training” but through spaces of *bildung*.



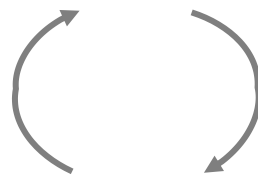
We generated a
Visual
Representation
as a conceptual
scheme
grounded in our
participatory
analysis

Our mapping of ethics aims at interrogating the limited actionability of “ethical recommendations” and the implications of ethics’ “checklisting”.

ETH-TECH PERSPECTIVE

The Ethical Conundrum

Planetary ruins
+
Political Power
+
Global Inequality



Techno-solutionism

Social /Individual
Consequences
→ Addiction/dependencies
→ Biases/Discrimination
→ Cultural Impoverishment

Ethical Solutionism
Individualisation of Responsibility

ETH-TECH Instruments of mediation

Ethics as a critical inquiry

Mediation

Critical Co-design

Contextualisation

Ethics as a practice of care

Future Imagination
Values/Discourses/Praxis

ETH-TECH imagined future scenarios

Cultural and Socio-technological diversity

Collective
Technological
Sovereignty/agency

Care/Inclusion

Local value

Utopia

Ethics of care
Responsibility as a collective
construction with an individual
contribution

Educators' BILDUNG (not «training»)

The role of affective infrastructures

Should we consider an ethics of care, that takes into account the affective infrastructures?

*Emotions align individuals with communities and social spaces in intensities mediated by the ways in which they are affected and, as subjects are immersed in a network that includes not only people, but also spaces, institutions and discourses, **affect appears as an unintentional mediator** of the relationships between individuals and their environment.*

Stephanie Martinic, PhD student, 2025

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T

- ABOUT
- DESIRED ARTICLES
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Care Ethics

The moral theory known as “the ethics of care” implies that there is moral significance in the fundamental elements of relationships and dependencies in human life. Normatively, care ethics seeks

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Rewild My Heart: With Pedagogies of Love, Kindness and the Sun and Moon

[Original Articles](#) | [Open access](#) | Published: 11 July 2022

Volume 6, pages 610–626, (2024) [Cite this article](#)

OXFORD

EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

Power & the Ethics of Knowing

MIRANDA FRICKER

Not supererogation, but responsibility

Nussbaum's interpretation of Aristotle is helpful on this score:

[Aristotle] holds that the truly good person will not only act well but also feel the appropriate emotions about what he or she chooses. ...

Fricker, 2007, p.89 and p.85

Cited texts:

Murdoch, I. (1970, p.28= 'The Idea of Perfection' in *The Sovereignty of Good*, Routledge.

Nussbaum, M. (2003) *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions*, Cambridge UP

wisest person remains open to surprises. Or, rather, the fact that she is open-hearted enough to resist the dishonest safety of fixed moral understandings is the crowning mark of her moral wisdom. This is what Iris Murdoch means when she says: 'Moral tasks are characteristically endless not only because "within", as it were, a given concept our efforts are imperfect, but also because as we move and as we look our concepts themselves are changing

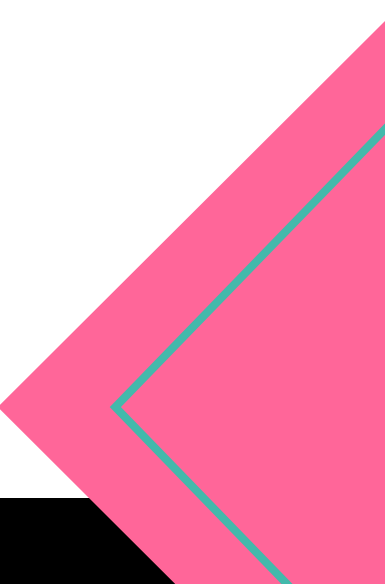
***Searching for a dynamic balance
in different contexts***

(Zilio, 2025)



Ethics does not belong to the machine

Points to discuss (place to the center of our educational intervention):

- How can we deal with the centrality of teachers and learners' ethics as a PRACTICE, POLITICS AND AGENCY where...
 - **...RESPONSIBILITY for the other is key (the non-banality of our actions, beyond norms and correct procedures)?**
 - BUT...
 - **...Is responsibility teachable/learnable? Which are the limits of our professional intervention as educators?**
- 



Thank you!

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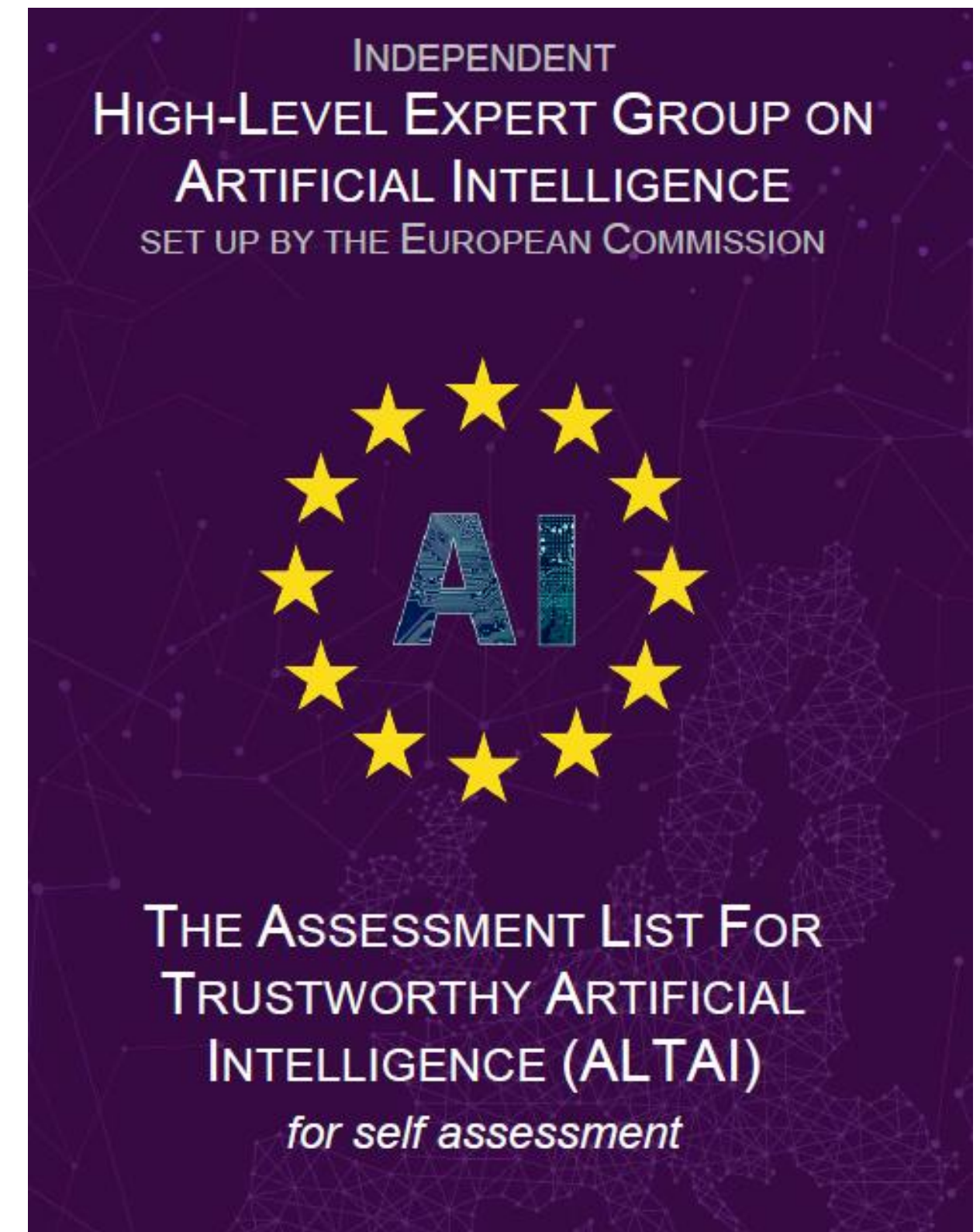
Ethics in the UE discourse

2019

- Human Agency & Oversight
- Technical Robustness and Safety
- Privacy & Data Governance
- Transparency
- Diversity, non-discrimination & Fairness
- Societal & Environmental Well-Being
- Accountability

2020

- White book on AI: An European approach for Excellence and Trust

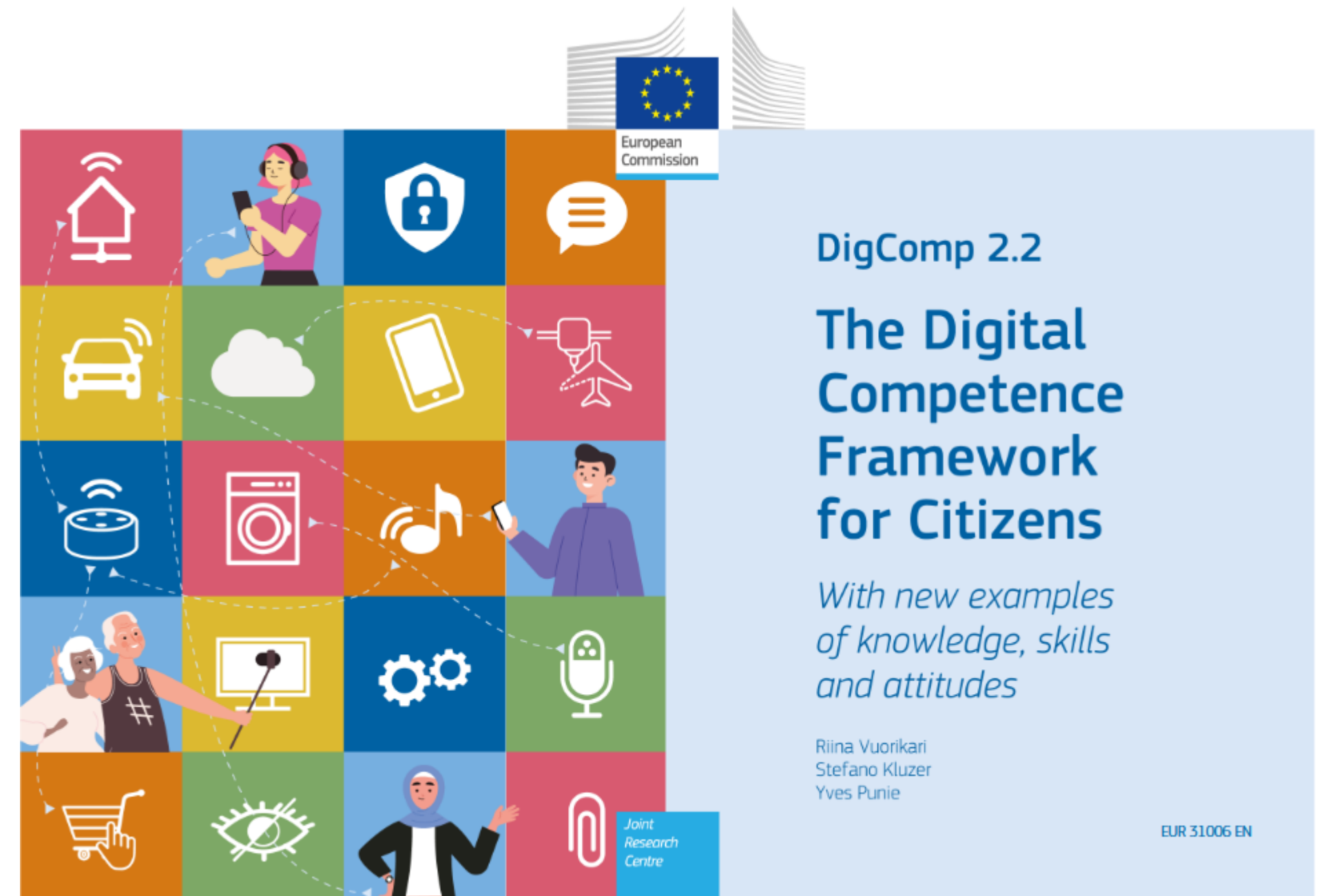
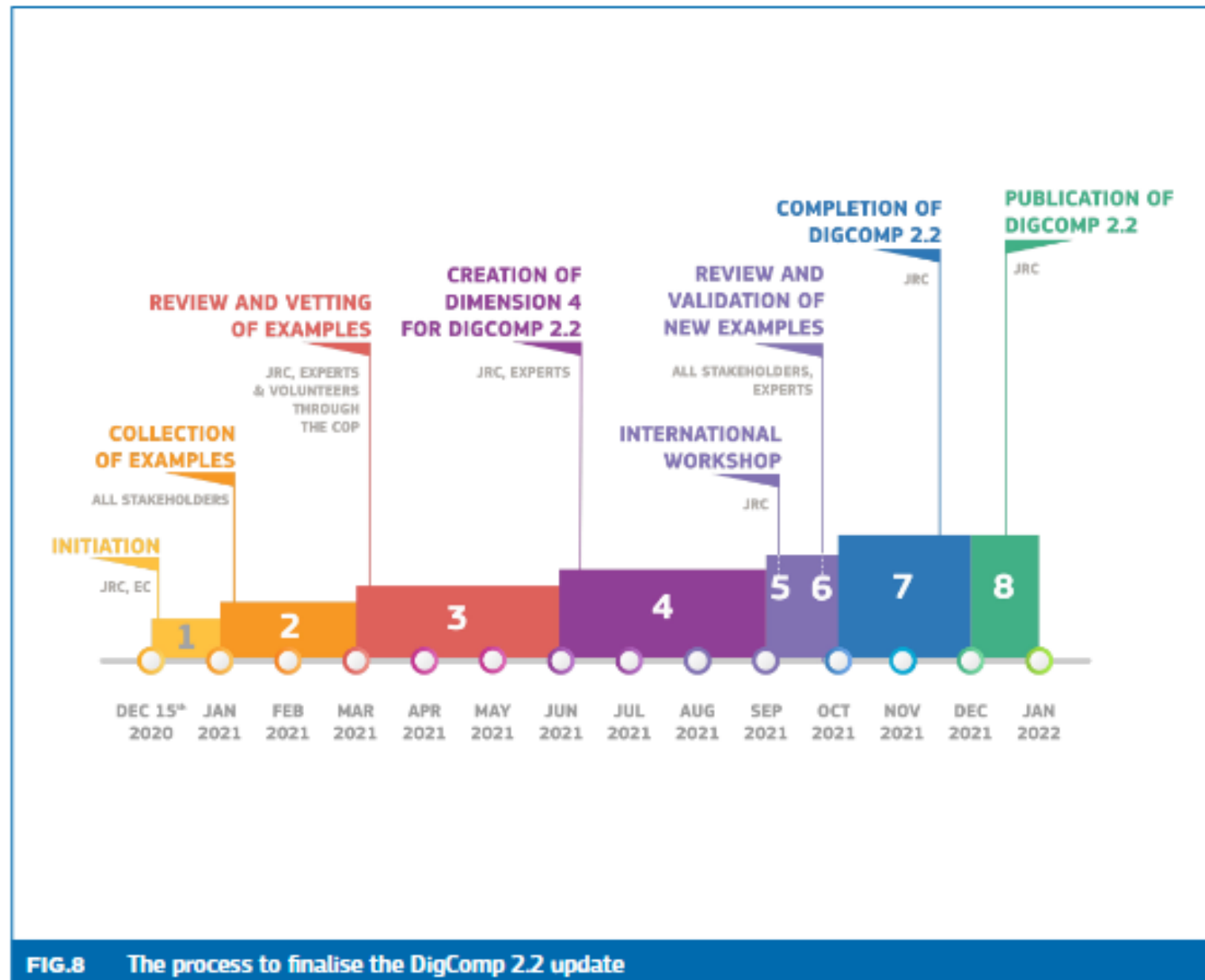


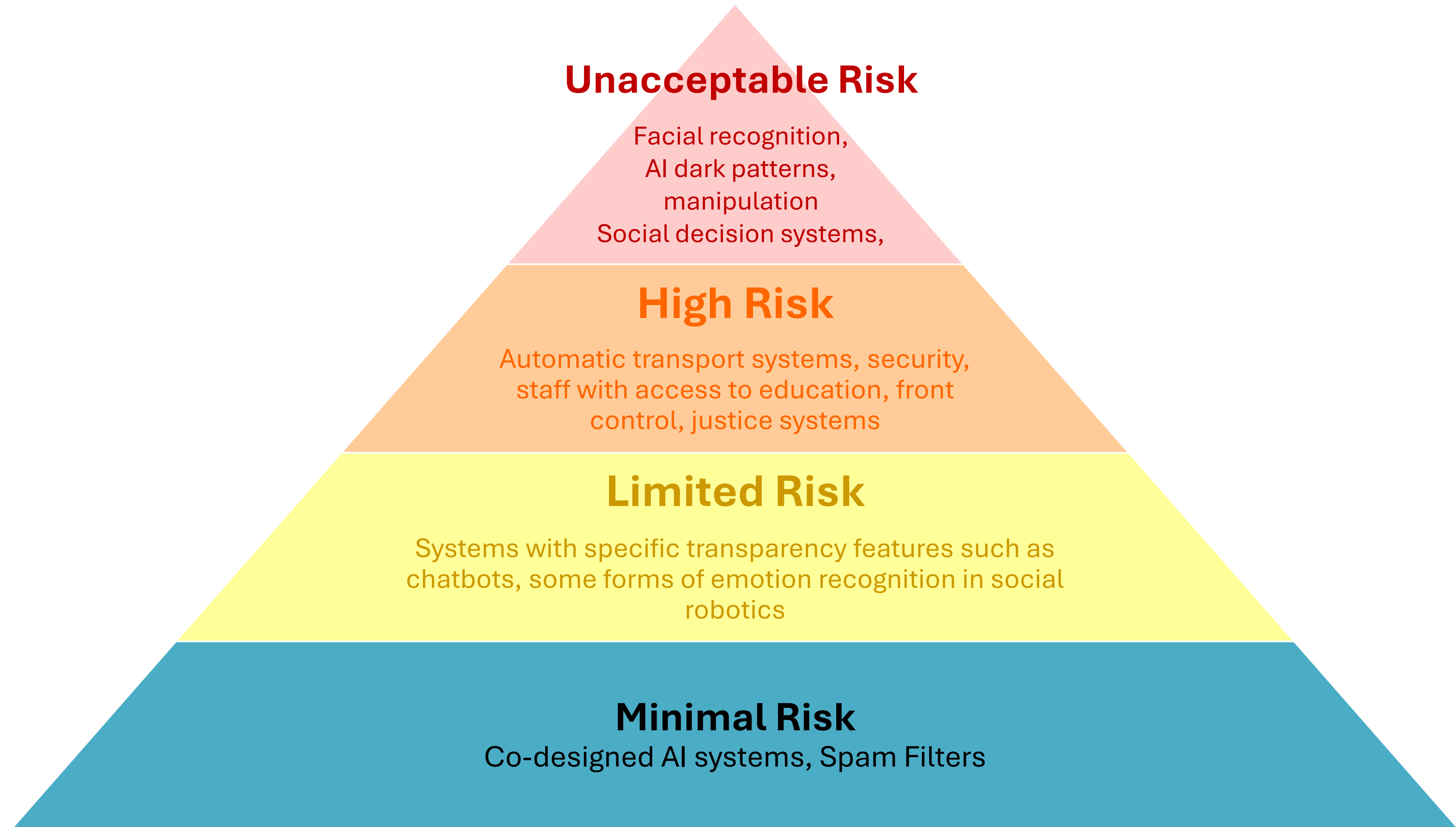
JRC (2022). DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens

<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128415>

And EU Commission (2021). Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)

<https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/about/digital-education-action-plan>





Main AI regulation in Europe