



# Automating Society 2020

life in the automated society

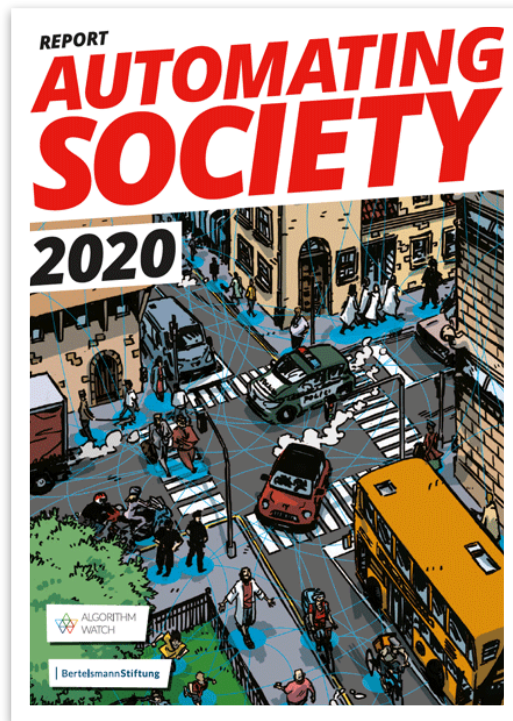
FABIO CHIUSI | DATAHARVEST PRESENTATION | 3 NOV 2020



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# The Automating Society 2020 report



- What is it and how did we gather our evidence?
- The evidence: what are the main findings?
- Policy recommendations: what to do, then?



## / Still taking stock of ADM in Europe

- The AS2020 report builds on its first edition to provide a better — even though still not exhaustive — picture of how **Automated Decision-Making (ADM) systems** are being piloted/deployed throughout Europe
- It also provides a series of **Policy Recommendations** to make sure that this is done consistently with human rights and democracy



- **16** investigated countries  
+ a chapter on the **EU**
- A team of **40+** people  
involved, with 30+  
researchers and  
journalists from all studied  
countries





# The report



- Multiple communicative styles — journalism, research and graphic novel illustrations — to reach the broadest of audience: **ADM matters to all of us**
- An AS2020 “preview report” on ADM in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic has been published in August



# Main findings

*From Automating Society to the automated society*

## ADM is

- Already a part of everyday life for millions of European citizens, affecting their health, welfare, job and rights more broadly
- **On the rise all over Europe — and fast**
- The clearest example of the sudden rise of ADM in Europe is face recognition
  - Nearly absent from the previous edition, face recognition is suddenly everywhere, even in the face of mounting evidence of its discriminatory outcomes.



# / Main findings

- **Actual uses** of ADM in action throughout Europe include systems:
  - to predict the risk of gender violence (e.g. Viogén, SPA)
  - for fraud detection (e.g. of taxes, SLO, and medical prescriptions, POR)
  - to best allocate pupils in schools (e.g., in BEL)
  - for predictive jurisprudence (e.g., in ITA)
  - for smile detection (in POL)
  - to predict “life events” and their corresponding service needs (FIN)
  - to suggest potential cancer treatments (SWI)



## Main findings

**The automated society is opaque.**

A fundamental lack of transparency has  
been denounced by all our researchers -  
and this needs to change



## / Main findings

- This systemic of transparency makes it **difficult to research** and, consequently, **provide an evidence-based judgement** concerning the overall contribution of ADM systems to society
- Most of the times, this endemic opacity of ADM systems is exploited **precisely to prevent scrutiny**
- It also means that the automated society established itself **without any meaningful democratic debates** around its principles and uses



# / Main findings

- Judging by the evidence we were able to gather, the potential of ADM to both individuals and society is far from being realised
- The vast majority of uses recorded in AS2020 **tend to put people at risk rather than help them**
- But they are being piloted/deployed nonetheless, because *technological solutionism*



## / Main findings

It is however possible to challenge the algorithmic status quo

- Role of national DPAs and ombudspersons
- Civil society, academia and journalism can effectively serve as “**watchdogs**” of the automated society.



# / Main findings

- **Examples** of the activity of civil society, academia and journalism as watchdogs of ADM include:
  - SyRI (NED): faulty tax fraud detection ADM system, brought to court and **halted**
  - Trelleborg model for fully automated welfare decisions (SWE): a journalist obtained the **release of its code**
  - Face recognition pilot project for train stations (GER) **halted** thanks to loud opposition of activists



# What to do about ADM in Europe?

We detailed some policy recommendations that we think should be implemented to both reconcile the promise of ADM systems with democracy and human rights, and to actually realise their potential



# / Policy recommendations

- **Increase the transparency of ADM systems**
  - Establish **public registers for ADM systems** used within the public sector
  - Introduce **legally-binding data access frameworks** to support and enable public interest research



# Policy recommendations

- **Create a meaningful accountability framework for ADM systems**
  - Develop and establish approaches to effectively audit algorithmic systems
  - Support civil society organisations as watchdogs of the automated society
  - Ban face recognition that might amount to mass surveillance



# Policy recommendations

- **Enhance algorithmic literacy and strengthen public debate on ADM systems**
  - Establish independent centers of expertise on ADM
  - Promote an inclusive and diverse democratic debate around ADM systems



# Read the report



[automatingsociety.algorithmwatch.org](https://automatingsociety.algorithmwatch.org)