Website address:
https://www.gesundheitsindustrie-bw.de/en/article/press-release/nationales-forschungszentrum-fuer-ki-spitzenforschung-tuebingen-feiert-seine-gruendung

National Research Center for cutting-edge AI research in Tübingen celebrates inception

On Tuesday, July 18, 2023, the Tübingen AI Center held a symposium to celebrate its permanent establishment as a national AI center. Since July 1, 2022, it has received 20 million euros a year in funding from the federal government and the state. Around 250 guests from the fields of science, industry and politics took part in a varied program which included speeches from politicians, researchers and AI start-ups as well as initiatives introducing children and young people to Artificial Intelligence.

The President of the University of Tübingen, Professor Karla Pollmann, opened the program alongside the directors of the Tübingen AI Center, Professor Matthias Bethge and Professor Bernhard Schölkopf. In her address, Pollmann spoke of the scientific excellence and agility of AI researchers and the rapid growth of the AI ecosystem in the region. In particular, she stressed the special role of AI in the ongoing development of the University and praised the close cooperation with the Cluster of Excellence for Machine Learning which aims to make the best possible use of the new opportunities offered by AI for research in various scientific disciplines.

Matthias Bethge thanked the Baden-Württemberg and federal governments for their long-term support for the Tübingen AI Center. Over the next few years this will enable a doubling of the founding team of professors, Max Planck directors and research group leaders and the creation of an attractive academic research environment. Bethge advocated maximum agility so that research, transfer and education can keep up with the pace of global AI development: "We are facing major challenges and questions about the future, and our scientists are intensely dedicated to making our society here in Germany and in Europe fit for shaping the future."

Bernhard Schölkopf added that the Tübingen AI Center works closely with the European Laboratory for Intelligent Systems (ELLIS). Generous funding from the Hector Foundation has enabled the first ELLIS institute which is currently being built in Tübingen, and which together with the Tübingen AI Center will recruit the best brains.

In his speech, Minister-President Winfried Kretschmann emphasized that the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg had already laid the foundations for an innovation campus for Artificial Intelligence and intelligent systems with the establishment of Cyber Valley back in 2016. "Today, Tübingen heads the list of European locations for AI research, has the only Master's degree program in machine learning in Germany, and with ELLIS is forming a network to attract the best brains from across Europe to Baden-Württemberg," said Kretschmann. And Tübingen's appeal is increasing, he said. With annual funding of ten million euros each from federal and state governments until at least 2028, the AI Center is a magnet for top researchers. "Technological sovereignty is more essential than ever for a strategically independent Europe which can compete against China and the USA," said Kretschmann: "So Artificial Intelligence is not an option – it is essential."

The Parliamentary State Secretary of the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), Mario Brandenburg, emphasized the importance of the AI centers of excellence: "Artificial Intelligence is a key technology that above all offers many opportunities. To make the most of these opportunities, we must continue to strengthen AI research and the training of specialists. At the same time, we also have to intensify the realization of real-life applications, and expedite national and European networking. The Tübingen AI Center and the entire Stuttgart-Tübingen region stand as an example of this vision. Together with other AI centers of excellence, this is a strong foundation for Germany as an AI location."

After the ceremony, scientists from the Tübingen AI Center presented current research. This covered topics such as explainable machine learning (XAI) or the use of machine learning for sustainable AI. The Managing Director of Cyber Valley GmbH, Rebecca Reisch, described the importance of technology transfer from basic research to industry. What transfer like this can actually mean was presented by the start-ups Maddox AI, a spin-off from the Tübingen AI Center, and Aleph Alpha, a member of the Cyber Valley start-up network.

Then, the Baden-Württemberg Minister of Science, Research and the Arts, Petra Olschowski, spoke about the new social challenges and opportunities associated with AI: "AI research has made impressive progress recently. Machine Learning methods like those being researched at the Tübingen AI Center have special potential here and are an increasing part of our lives – examples range from personalized medical diagnosis through to chatbots. But the social effects of these future AI

technologies also need thought and molding. So the new AI Center places humans at its heart," said the minister. "The new center is a valuable addition to our Cyber Valley innovation campus model, combining basic research and transfer with the education of the highly sought-after specialists of tomorrow." In conclusion, she congratulated two former winners of the Bundeswettbewerb für Künstliche Intelligenz (BWKI), which was launched by the Tübingen AI Center together with Bosch in 2018, and now receives significant funding from the Carl Zeiss Foundation.

Other guests represented two projects that had successfully applied for funding from the Agile Transfer Fund. This new program from the Tübingen AI Center aims to help researchers and students realize socially useful ideas with the aid of Artificial Intelligence: the objective of the Polybot project headed by Wieland Brendel is to use swarms of flexible mini-robots to create the technological conditions for the automation of a regenerative form of agriculture. Financial support has allowed the team to attract highly-qualified staff rapidly. "KI macht Schule" looks to make AI technology accessible to school pupils and to help ensure quick and competent integration of the subject into the syllabus. Using funds from the Agile Transfer Fund, the team can develop interactive teaching and learning materials based on the latest research.

About the Tübingen AI Center

The Tübingen AI Center is a research institute of the University of Tübingen in cooperation with the Max Planck Institute for Intelligent Systems (MPI-IS). The goal of the researchers is to advance the development of robust learning systems for the benefit of society and the economy. Learning algorithms will require less data and be able to cope successfully with external and unforeseen influences. At the same time, machines' decision-making processes will become fairer and more easy to interpret. The center intends to pursue new ways of combining basic research with transfer and education, and together with other researchers within Europe contribute to socially-valuable technologies being developed under the label "AI made in Europe".

Like with four other centers backed by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research, since July 1, 2022, it has received 20 million euros a year from the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) and the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Economy and Culture (MWK). Embedded in the rapidly-growing Tübingen campus of science and technology, the scientists at Tübingen AI Center work closely with the Europe-wide Research Network ELLIS and the Baden-Württemberg Cyber Valley initiative, which links researchers with start-ups and industry in the region.

Press release

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