Michael Rovatsos
Position Statement for the IFAAMAS Board Elections 2018

Biographical note

I am a Reader (US Associate Professor) at the School of Informatics of the University of Edinburgh, where I have been a faculty member since completing my PhD at the Technical University of Munich in 2004, which was on learning multiagent communication strategies. I have published over 90 papers across a broad range of topics in multiagent systems, including multiagent learning, planning, communication, argumentation, norms, social reasoning, trust and reputation. I have been involved in externally funded collaborative research projects worth over £10m. Extended research visits to MIT, Harvard, USC, Aachen, UPF Barcelona, CTU Prague, Dubai, and Melbourne have involved collaborations with colleagues from the multiagent systems, planning, and computational social science communities.

My current research focus is on responsible, explainable, and human-friendly AI, and on developing ethically sound innovation models for AI. I have recently been appointed Director of the Bayes Centre for Data Science and AI at Edinburgh, which is part of a £300m investment in the University to boost regional growth in these areas, and will be overseeing the work of 600 people in the Centre.

Involvement with the AAMAS Community

I have attended AAMAS 11 times since 2002 (as well as its predecessors ICMAS and Autonomous Agents in 2000 and 2001), and presented a total of 15 full papers at these events. I am Co-Chair of the Blue Sky Track in 2018, was Publications Chair in 2011, and co-chaired an AAMAS workshop in 2003. I have also acted as Programme Co-Chair for EUMAS 2015, was on the Scientific Committee of EASSS 2014, have given tutorials at four IFAAMAS-sponsored Summer Schools, and invited talks at AAMAS Workshops and Doctoral Consortia.

Other Community Service

I am currently Conference Coordination Officer for ACM SIGAI, Associate Editor for the Knowledge and Information Systems Journal, and on the Steering Committee of the AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society. I have organised 11 further workshops, and have been on the (Senior) Programme Committees of 86 events, including many editions of other top-tier conferences such as IJCAI, AAAI, and ECAI.

Position Statement

While AI is becoming a household term and its socioeconomic impact is growing at an extraordinary rate, agents and multiagent systems research is not receiving nearly the amount of attention it deserves outside the AAMAS community. The diversity of the community is often seen as an impediment to achieving better visibility (which ultimately translates to sustainability and growth), but I believe it is in fact a key strength – our community invented computational auctions long before Google, electronic institutions long before Blockchain, and conversational agents long before Siri, just to give a few examples. Our weakness, however, has been to be too inward-looking and to operate within disconnected sub-communities.

If elected, I would actively engage with the breadth of the AAMAS community to improve our visibility within the current AI landscape. I would aim to explore several concrete activities should in this direction:

- Defining real-world challenges where AAMAS research can make substantial contributions
- Providing more support for researchers who are keen to translate their results to real-world impact
- Fostering dialogue between sub-communities and with those outside AAMAS to exploit synergies
- Targeting key industries and public organisations to engage actively with AAMAS researchers

None of these (and similar) activities pose a threat to the rigour and quality of AAMAS, but we need a culture shift to apply our high standards to aspects of research that have received too little attention in the past. I would hope that my in-depth knowledge of the community and the broader AI landscape would enable me to make a strong contribution to IFAAMAS in this direction.