

# SUSSKIND: «THE 2020S WILL BE THE TURNING POINT IN LEGAL TECHNOLOGY»

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**MAG interviewed the professor, an expert in the transformation of the legal profession: «Systems will take over tasks that in the past could only be done by humans»**

by giuseppe salemme

Oxford, 1983. Richard Susskind, a 22-year-old Scot fresh out of law school, begins writing his Phd. Topic: the relationship between law and artificial intelligence. He would earn it three years later, in 1986; to provide context, Geneva's Cern would announce the birth of the World Wide Web only five years later, in 1991.

«I've spent my whole life thinking about this topic» Susskind began in one of his now well-known keynote speeches, this time delivered at the Baker McKenzie Spring Forum, an event organized by the U.S. firm in Zurich in early March. The global mainstream success that many artificial intelligence-based products have experienced in recent months must not have surprised Susskind as much as it has surprised the rest of the world; but it certainly helped give shape and substance to

what has been his warning for years. And that is, in short, that technological progress will disrupt the professional market and the very way we conceive professions; with lawyers being the among the firsts to surrender their traditional role.

Not that someone like Susskind needs any confirmation. A professor at Oxford, London and Strathclyde, he has been strategic and technology adviser to the Lord Chief Justice of England since 1998, and since 2011 he has been chair of both the advisory board of the Oxford Internet Institute and the Society for Computers and Law. His books have been translated into more than 10 languages, and in 2000 he was even made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II herself, in recognition of his contribution to the administration of justice and IT in law.

MAG had already crossed paths with him on a couple of occasions: in June 2018 (<https://legalcommunity.it/susskind-lex-machina/>) and February 2020 (<https://legalcommunity.it/susskind-comincia-leta-della-trasformazione/>). This last meeting was in the context of the presentation of *Online courts and the future of justice*, a book in which Susskind presented his vision of a world where justice is digitized, the use of physical courts is merely a last resort, and artificial intelligence helps people and businesses represent their interests without the need for lawyers, ensuring cheap and universal access to justice.

As chance would have it, only weeks after the book's release, the world found itself forced by the pandemic to prepare the most extensive "online justice" experimentation in history. MAG's latest chat with Susskind, on the sidelines of the aforementioned Spring Forum in Zurich, begins with the analysis of the results of that experience. The author is presenting the third edition of his 2013 bestseller *Tomorrow's lawyers*, in which he positively assesses the remote justice experience of the covid age; as long as we do not believe that video hearings are the final stage of technology applied to our justice systems.

"In March 2020 I led the team that set up a website called Remote Courts Worldwide: its purpose was to track how courts moved from being physical to being remote during the covid period" Susskind tells MAG. "There are now more than 170 countries that have used remote courts in one way or another: that was unimaginable in January 2020. People often criticise judges and lawyers and say they're slow to adapt. To be fair, we can say now that when they needed to adapt, they did it very quickly. But it wasn't a choice: it was the only thing they could do."

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