

WG1 MEETING: CITIZENS, EXPERTS AND INSTITUTIONS: EMPIRICAL ANALYSES OF PUBLIC POLICY ARGUMENTATION

13 January 2020, online meeting hosted by Université catholique de Louvain

The link to the online meeting will be communicated in due time in January to registered participants.

Registration is open till 6 January via the following link:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=1JCwei76z068fEEEntNWC7C0x4aleq79KiBNfM_gX2rJUOExVQkRXNk9UMzZC0dH50hFUVNOQkRaUC4u

Programme

Authors could make a proposal for one of the following types of presentations: (A) conference paper (15' + 15'), (B) launching a new Call for collaboration (10' + 10').

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| 10.00-10.15 | Welcome by WG1-president Sara Greco |
| 10.15-10.45 | On arguments from ignorance in policy-making (A) (Corina Andone and Alfonso Lomeli) |
| 10.45-11.15 | The importance of self-reference in argumentation on Twitter: a comparison of politicians and experts in the covid-19 crisis (A) (Barbara De Cock and Jan Albert van Laar) |
| 11.15-11.35 | Claim-making and political responsibility attribution in the construction of a public problem during the COVID-19 lockdown (Alexandru I. Cărlan and Irina Diana Mădroane) |
| 11.35-12.00 | General discussion on the papers of this session and presentation of the call for papers for <i>The pandemic of argumentation</i> |
| 12.00-13.00 | <i>Lunch break</i> |
| 13.00-13.30 | Who leads the #FashionRevolution? A study of the presentation of agents related to fashion sustainability (A) (Laetitia Aulit, Sara Cigada, Barbara De Cock, Sara Greco, Ewa Modrzejewska, Rudi Palmieri) |
| 13.30-14.00 | Conflicting frames and argumentation in the public controversy over fashion sustainability (A) (Chiara Mercuri) |
| 14.00-14.20 | Tracking and predicting arguments in lobbying (Scott Davidson and Irina Lock) |
| 14.20-14.35 | General discussion on the papers of this session |

14.35-14.50 *Coffee break*

14.50-15.20 The making of European audiences or the exclusiveness of European public communication (A) (Sandrine Roginsky)

15.20-15.50 The mediatization of EU internal relations: Recovering standing standpoints and networked arguments from the front pages about the Greek perspective on the Brexit news (Dimitris Serafis and Assimakis Tseronis)

15.50-16.05 General discussion on the papers of this session

16.05-16.15 Closing comments

Abstracts

Abstracts are presented in alphabetical order as per first author.

On arguments from ignorance in policy-making (A)

Corina Andone, (University of Amsterdam) and Alfonso Lomeli Hernandez (University of Italian Switzerland)

Policy-makers are oftentimes confronted with situations in which they lack vital information to handle certain problems in the best way. A few prominent examples of such situations include the mad cow disease, the Ebola outbreak, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Even if little or no evidence is available in such situations, policy-makers have to take decisions with drastic consequences for citizens. To do so, policy-makers employ ‘arguments from ignorance’.

What is particularly challenging about such arguments is that, despite the ignorance involved, they are used to justify specific policies meant to deal with practical problems. Limited information (e.g., no evidence had been found that the coronavirus transmits to children up to the age of 12) is used as basis for political decisions that might have significant consequences for the population (e.g., it is safe for children to go to school).

The precise interaction between science and policy-making in these situations is insufficiently known, let alone explained. It is our aim to first explain the intricate but unavoidable relationship between arguments from evidence and policy-making. Subsequently, we will provide criteria for distinguishing between reasonable and unreasonable arguments from ignorance in policy-making.

Who leads the #FashionRevolution? A study of the presentation of agents related to fashion sustainability (A)

Laetitia Aulit (Université catholique de Louvain), Sara Cigada (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Barbara De Cock (Université catholique de Louvain), Sara Greco (Università della Svizzera italiana), Ewa Modrzejewska (University of Warsaw), Rudi Palmieri (University of Liverpool)

In this paper, we analyze who is represented as responsible for ethical and environmental problems related to the fashion industry as well as for possible solutions to these problems, in a corpus of tweets containing the hashtag *#FashionRevolution*. This corpus contains messages produced by experts, companies, NGOs and consumers in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish. We look into

the representation of agentivity, namely who among the agents related to fashion sustainability is represented as agentive for the causes or possible solutions of problems related to sustainability in the fashion industry, as well as into whether these agents are represented in an explicit or implicit way and whether this is justified argumentatively. We furthermore look into whether tweeters define about which type of sustainability (ethical, environmental or both) they are talking. Through the combination of these analyses, we show how misalignment can occur in this Twitter polylogue regarding the definition of the sustainable issues at hand as well as regarding who can play a crucial part in solving these issues. By analyzing a multilingual corpus, we aim to contribute to analyzing how these online discussions evolve at the European level and how they are potentially construed differently across linguistic communities.

Claim-Making and Political Responsibility Attribution in the Construction of a Public Problem during the COVID-19 Lockdown (B)

Alexandru I. Cârlan, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration and Irina Diana Mădroane, West University of Timișoara

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis travelling restrictions, in March and April 2020, images of seasonal workers from Eastern Europe contracted for unskilled labour in Germany and the UK sparked off an intense media debate across the EU. The arguments and claims regarding the mobility of temporary workers in these extraordinary circumstances came to articulate the public problem of seasonal migrant labour in the European media: bilateral agreements between governments meant to solve the scarcity of labour in Germany or the UK were invoked as proof of double standards in relation to COVID-19 restrictions, but also as an admission of the sending states' incapacity to cater for their citizens or as evidence of the maintenance of a labour division within the EU, which would reinforce relations of (economic) power between centre and (mainly postcommunist) periphery.

Employing a public problem approach (Cefaï 1996; Gusfield 1981; see also Beciu et al. 2018), our study looks into the attribution of political responsibility in the media and political actors' definitions of the situation and claims for policy intervention. Empirically, in the context of the broader debates in the Romanian, German and British public spheres, a first step of the analysis focuses on the exchange of arguments between a left-leaning Romanian journalist and a former, right-leaning Prime Minister of Romania and current MEP, exchange that took place in op-eds published in a major Romanian newspaper.

Starting from the notion that framing involves making argument premises selectively salient in support of a claim (Fairclough 2016; Fairclough and Mădroane 2020; see also Cărlan and Ciocea 2018), we aim to cast light on how the discursive negotiation of political agency and responsibility, within various framing strategies, plays a role in the articulation of the public problem of seasonal migrant labour. The claim-making in this case revolves around the journalist's attempt, from a self-assumed position of symbolic representative of temporary migrants (Mădroane 2018; see Saward 2010), to mobilize an institutional actor into accepting "ownership" (Gusfield 1981) of the public problem of seasonal migrant labour and, hence, into taking responsibility for its resolution. Our broader research question is concerned with the constitution of public problems through the "interpellation" of political actors by media actors and through the public visibility acquired by the arguments and claims made in such debates.

Our call for collaborators has to do with the circulation of the arguments in the German, British and Austrian public sphere and with the possible existence of similar debates in the Bulgarian and Polish public spheres (and other public spheres in countries of origin for seasonal migrant workers).

Tracking and predicting arguments in lobbying (B)

Scott Davidson (University of Leicester) and Irina Lock (University of Amsterdam)

In lobbying processes, resource-rich organisations hold the ability to horizon scan and to know who is saying what to whom, while resource-poor groups, do not have the ability to pay agencies for monitoring services. This enables the information/legislative subsidy advantage (Hall and Deardorff 2006). Lobbying documents remain hard to locate and analyse. When starting with a concern for legitimacy, the ability to track lobbying arguments across different policy venues is a potentially powerful corrective tool.

Therefore, our goal is to develop a (potentially predictive) methodology and tool to detect argumentation strategies in lobbying documents and to subsequently automatize this argumentative analysis to eventually uncover typical argumentation strategies by lobbying organisations. Theoretically, we aim to contribute an argumentation theory perspective to inform the literatures of strategic communication, public relations, and public affairs/lobbying. This would take our earlier work on framing the "public interest" in lobbying campaigns (Ihlen et.al 2018; Lock et.al 2020; Valentini et.al 2020), the recognition of rhetorical plotting and policy responses to communicative inequalities (Davidson 2020, 2017), and the contradictions around corporate sustainability strategies and lobbying one step further. Such a tool could also make a positive civic society impact when utilised by resource-poor civic society organizations for their lobbying efforts.

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The importance of self-reference in argumentation on Twitter: a comparison of politicians and experts in the covid-19 crisis (A)

Barbara De Cock (Université catholique de Louvain) and Jan Albert van Laar (Universiteit Groningen)

In this talk, we look into how Belgian, Dutch and Spanish politicians and experts involved in the covid-19 crisis construct self-reference on Twitter and on how this self-reference ties in with the ways they explain or justify the positions they adopt.

In the first place, we analyze how these persons construct their self-reference on Twitter, taking into account the different affordances of Twitter, such as the content of tweets and of the biography. We also focus on whether these persons construct an explicit self-reference through 1st person forms or rather avoid such explicit self-reference.

In the second place, we analyze how the communicative functions of this self-reference connect to the argumentation developed, or prepared, in the tweets. Indeed, self-reference contributes to self-introduction, and to the creation of a public persona.

Through a comparison of politicians and scientific experts, we will to show the specific roles that self-reference hold in the discourse of each group. We expect self-reference to be more important in politicians' discourse, for the reason that when arguing, politicians face more problems when polishing their public persona, or when trying to keep it intact, than experts do.

Conflicting frames and argumentation in the public controversy over fashion sustainability (A)

Chiara Mercuri (Università della Svizzera italiana)

In this paper, I present the working hypothesis that lies at the core of my PhD research. I will investigate the relationship between conflicting frames and argumentation in the public controversy surrounding fashion sustainability, which represents an instance of argumentative *polylogue* (Lewiński & Aakhus, 2014). In a controversy, parties hold their own semantic frames (Fillmore, 1976), which correspond to simplified interpretations of reality and that can lead to the exacerbation of conflicts (Shmueli et al., 2006).

In this respect, argumentation theory (van Eemeren, 2018) can help to understand the reasons behind frames, which are related to the underlying implicit premises in argumentative terms. While this connection has been previously acknowledged (van Eemeren, 2010; Greco, 2012), it remains yet to be systematically researched.

To investigate this relationship empirically, I plan to select a corpus composed of different texts, which will include fashion brands sustainability reports, documents by the European Union and social media posts about important fashion events.

In the corpus, I will identify the different conflicting frames and reconstruct their underlying argumentative premises. I will then perform an argumentative analysis of the polylogue, in order to reflect on the connection between semantic frames and argumentation theory in a public controversy.

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The making of European audiences or the exclusiveness of European public communication (A)

Sandrine Roginsky (Université catholique de Louvain)

The presentation will discuss theories and methodologies that can be useful to explore the representation of audiences in European communication (i.e. communication of institutions such as the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council), notably on social media platforms. In doing so, it will question the concept of audience/public which crosses different disciplines, such as linguistics, rhetoric and argumentative studies, communication and media research but also political science. Audience/public is indeed a “boundary concept” (Esquenazi, 2009), which is approached as a lens to examine European communication. The corpus that has been built for the research brings together semi-structured interviews, print screens and institutional documents and has therefore some level of heterogeneity. Analyzing the construction of publics (or audiences) reminds us that knowing target-audiences cannot be taken for granted. Building-up audiences is a professional skill which, in the context of European institutions, seems to fall into the competency of communication professionals. The process of audience representation draws different figures of audiences. The dominant figure is driven by indicators and the production of an ideal public, constituted of (young), active, committed citizens, who are convinced Europeans or will be so shortly.

With regards to the COST action, such reflection may provide some “food for thought” regarding the way Europeans are portrayed in European communication and the place they are given, in European discourse at least, when it comes to decision-making.

The mediatization of EU internal relations: Recovering standing standpoints and networked arguments from the front pages about the Greek perspective on the Brexit news (A)

Dimitris Serafis (University of Malta) & Assimakis Tseronis (Örebro University)

This presentation examines the role that printed news media play in informing citizens about complex policy issues and decision-making processes that take place at the European level but interact with ongoing crises at the national level. More specifically, we examine how Brexit was presented on the front pages of the Greek mainstream press the day after the official result was announced. Adopting a polylogical argumentative perspective (Aakhus & Lewiński 2017), we see front pages as multimodal canvases where the main positioning of the newspaper is supported by implicit micro-argumentative moves, which not only address the heterogeneous audiences of each newspaper but also combine to create a network of arguments that may eventually converge in supporting one standing standpoint (Mohammed 2019). In order to recover those argumentative inferences, we pay attention to the multimodal meaning making processes by applying a number of distinctions that have been introduced in the study of multimodal argumentation (Rocci & Pollaroli 2018; Serafis et al. 2020; Tseronis & Forceville 2017) and using some relevant tools from multimodal discourse analysis (Ledin & Machin 2020). We show how the newspapers' multimodal argumentation despite their different perspectives on the topic ends up converging to a standing standpoint, according to which the *EU integration should be secured at any cost*.

References

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