

Modelling Social Complexity in Argumentation

16 – 18 November, Lorentz Center @Snellius (online)

Scientific

Short description of the aims for the virtual meeting – Argumentation plays a major role in how people learn from others and persuade others, as we discuss the issues of the day with friends and colleagues, read analyses of current situations from journalists and pundits, and engage with other people on social media. Different domains have studied people's reasoning with arguments empirically, such as cognitive science, rhetoric, and persuasion. Most of this research has neglected the social context in which persuasion takes place. However, argumentation and reasoning primarily takes place in social spaces. For this reason, it is important to understand how individual-oriented models of argumentation scale up when implemented in social dynamics. Agent-based modelling (ABM) is a technique ideally placed to pursue this type of question in the argumentation discipline. Given the relatively new expansion of ABM application in argumentation, the workshop provides an opportunity to learn about computational approaches to argumentation that are directly implementable in ABMs and to test these with novel methods. More broadly, the workshop aims to foster collaborative work between the argumentation and ABM communities and to exchange ideas and methods, and it is intended as a first step towards the creation of more structured collaborations between different communities.

Short summary of key moments (key debates, breakthroughs, etc.) – Overall, the members' presence and participation during the workshop was excellent. While we initially worried the digital nature (due to the pandemic) would dissuade engagement, participants were very eager to learn from each other, to overcome disciplinary boundaries and to break new ground together. The keynotes were especially appreciated by all the participants, and they were followed by lively and engaging debates. The group work was also engaging and during the final discussion several people mentioned that this workshop was the starting of a new community, and the organizers already planned follow-ups.

Outcome(s) – The workshop had three main outcomes. First, an online repository of members' work, interests and contacts was set up, thus creating a first virtual community. Second, workshop participants were invited to submit an abstract for a special issue proposal to be submitted to an international journal. Finally, the organizers offered to setup two more online events during 2021, with the aim of supporting the community and making it grow.

Organization

Preparation – Our original workplan was converted to an online environment: we reduced the number of days, and reorganized the interaction between members in form of subgroups with a concrete task.

Duration of the workshop and time management – Three days from 10:00 to 17:00: 3 keynotes, 2 workshops, 4 group sessions, and three general discussion sessions to close each day.

Platform(s) used before and during the workshop – Zoom

Short- and long-term plans for follow-ups – We are gauging interest in a potential special issue of *Argument and Computation* with a submission deadline the 1st of July 2021. We are planning to host online one-day events in 2021 along the same line as the workshop - these would be focussed either on practical workshops or on presenting work for each other. Finally, we will set up a Slack channel to build an online community.

Lessons learned for future virtual events – The break each day between 12:30-14:00 was much appreciated. Small group sessions worked very well, with the same group members and a concrete task for three days.

Lorentz Center (virtual) Support

The Lorentz Center has been very helpful and flexible in converting our original workshop to an online one.

Francesca Giardini (University of Groningen, the Netherlands)

Jos Hornikx (Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands)

Jens Madsen (London School of Economics, UK)