

VisArgue – Project overview

Large scale public infrastructure projects such as the construction of a new airport or a train station have repeatedly created conflicts between governments and the public sphere and the realization of the projects has become an incalculable risk for political decision makers. One way of attempting to overcome the divide between interest groups is to conduct mediation processes, where arguments are exchanged in order to persuade the discussion partner. The underlying concept of deliberative democracy as articulated within political science holds that a consensus can and should be arrived at in a deliberative discourse.

The project VisArgue takes an interdisciplinary view on the way arguments are exchanged and the kind of factors that in fact can be said to characterize a communication as deliberative. In particular, we investigate the linguistic means with which arguments are exchanged and how this is related to the notion of deliberation. The interplay of those cues and their entailments are encoded in a visual analytics system which makes the patterns more accessible and allows for hypothesis generation as well as verification. With this interdisciplinary approach we aim at a better understanding of deliberation per se, facilitated by linguistic information on discourse and innovative methods of visualization.

The talk on the first day provides an overview of the VisArgue project and presents some of the interesting challenges that arise when dealing with discourse and deliberation in an automated way. On the second day, we provide concrete examples of the visual analytic methods we are developing and show how they are informed by the research questions arising out of political science and by factoring in an analysis of linguistic cues with respect to argumentation in discourse.