

Argupolis : a doctoral program on argumentation practices in different communication contexts

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ARGUPOLIS: A DOCTORAL PROGRAM ON ARGUMENTATION PRACTICES IN DIFFERENT COMMUNICATION CONTEXTS

1. Argumentation in Context: Scientific and Social Relevance of the Program

Argumentation is a form of communicative interaction by means of which social realities – institutions, groups and relationships – are construed and managed. People develop argumentation in numerous purposeful activities: to make sound and well-thought decisions, to critically found their opinions, to persuade other people of the validity of their own proposals and to evaluate others' proposals. These activities are bound to the contexts in which they take place and are significantly determined by these contexts; thus argumentation too, as the bearing structure of these activities, moulds its strategies in connection with these very different contexts: from families and schools to social and political institutions, from financial markets to media discourse and journalism, from social and ethical debate to the economic and financial sphere.

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The doctoral program *Argupolis* originates from this awareness and is therefore constituted by a research and teaching endeavor focused on the study of argumentative practices embedded in different social contexts and shaping the communicative practices and interactions that constitute these contexts. *Argupolis* is part of the Pro*Doc program funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (project n. 123089).

2. Structure of *Argupolis*

The name of this doctoral program, *Argupolis*¹ (see www.argupolis.net), etymologically recalls the image of a town constituted by a network of interrelated argumentative contexts, represented by as many buildings (see Figure 1).

Four research institutes are responsible for the scientific direction of the program: the Institute of linguistics and semiotics at the Università della Svizzera italiana – University of Lugano (directed by Eddo Rigotti), the Institute of Psychology and Education at the University of Neuchâtel (Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont), the Institute of Psychology of the University of Lausanne (Michèle Grossen) and the Department of Speech Communication, Argumentation theory and Rhetoric of the University of Amsterdam (Frans H. van Eemeren). The program coordinator is Sara Greco Morasso. The strongly interdisciplinary composition of the network reflects the theoretical stance considering argumentation as the bearing structure of social practices in different contexts and allows for a more in-depth investigation of argumentative strategies as well as a better understanding of the texture of contexts.

The doctoral program *Argupolis* is based on a background tackling semantically and pragmatically communicative and logical properties of argumentation and creates a foreground centered on specific communication contexts in which argumentation is playing an essential role in the constitution and regulation of interactions (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2005; Rigotti 2006; Rigotti & Rocci 2006). *Argupolis*' research concentrates on

¹ The term *Argupolis* was originally introduced by Nathalie Muller-Mirza (formerly University of Neuchâtel, currently University of Lausanne) within the project *Argumentum* (www.argumentum.ch, see footnote 5).

Figure 1: The image of Argupolis; in the original version, colours highlight some relevant buildings representing as many communication contexts in which argumentation plays a relevant role (family, school, tribunal, and so on).



various contexts and, in particular, on three domains of interaction: education, economics and finance, and therapeutic interaction. The selected contexts, which are extremely relevant from a social point of view in their own right, constitute a largely new area of research; moreover, research concentrating on these contexts has already shown to have a clear added value at the national and international levels, because it offers new and indispensable instruments for the evaluation and improvement of argumentative practices and the connected communicative practices. Within these contexts, the interdisciplinary potential of the doctoral program network brings into the fore a number of crucial issues emerging in the recent developments of argumentation studies: the prevention and management of conflicts, the psycho-social dimension of argumentative contexts and practices (Perret Clermont, Carugati & Oates. 2004; Perret Clermont & Muller-Mirza 2009; Grossen 2001), the status of modality in argumentation (Rocci 2005), the role of context in designing argumentative strategies and the conditions for the effectiveness of argumentative interventions. Indeed, in the above-mentioned areas, the Swiss academic context, in

connection with the Argupolis' international network, offers a considerable potential of interdisciplinary resources that can make an original and valuable contribution to international research on argumentation.

3. Goals of Argupolis

Argupolis aims at providing PhD students with adequate conceptual and methodological tools to develop rigorous and innovative investigations of the specific manners in which argumentation is used in human interaction within different contextual spheres. It assists, on the one hand, to opening argumentation theorists to the acknowledgment of the relevance of context; on the other hand, it helps researchers studying specific contexts to discover the importance of argumentation – not only in fields where its relevance is traditionally taken for granted, like law and political discourse, but also in fields like economical and financial communication, health-care communication, and media discourse. In addition, *Argupolis* builds on the idea that argumentation is a constitutive dimension for knowledge construction for both the child's and the adolescent's development of socio-cognitive competences, which makes it an important object of concern in education.

4. The Argupolis Citizens: Faculty and PhD Students

4.1. Faculty

The faculty of Argupolis is constituted, beyond the directors of the institutes responsible for the scientific management of the program, by a number of international scholars working on argumentation in different communication contexts: Marcelo Dascal, University of Tel Aviv (Israel); Bart J. Garssen and A. Francisca Snoeck Henkemans, University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands); Erik C. W. Krabbe, Professor emeritus at the University of Groningen (The Netherlands); Lorenza Mondada, University of Lyon 2 (France); and Andrea Rocci, University of Lugano (Switzerland). Beyond this central kernel of scholars, Argupolis can also rely on the presence of an associated faculty whose members contribute to its educational program and are consulted for specific issues that concern the

students' research on argumentation in context². Other scholars dealing in particular with the contextualized dimension are collaborating to Argupolis as co-supervisors of specific dissertations and/or involved partners in research projects funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation³.

4.2. *PhD Students*

At the moment, 14 PhD students from Lugano, Neuchâtel, Lausanne and Amsterdam are involved in the educational program of Argupolis. 7 of them (4 in Lugano, 2 in Neuchâtel and 1 in Lausanne) are involved in research projects funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation in the framework of the support to Argupolis: "Argumentation as reasonable alternative to conflict" (project n. 123093); "The development of argumentation in children's interactions within ad hoc experimental and classroom contexts" (project n. 123102), "Learning and argumentation in peer-mediation at school" (project n. 123096), "Modality in Argumentation. A semantico-argumentative study of predictions in Italian economic-financial newspapers" (project n. 120740) and "Endoxa and cultural keywords in the pragmatics of argumentative discourse" (project n. 124845). Beyond these students, other external guests have shown their interest in the program either by participating to the inauguration courses or by indicating their preference to participate in other future parts of the program. These latter PhD students come from some Swiss universities (Lugano, Neuchâtel) but also, very significantly, from various locations abroad (Finland, Greece, Italy, Kazakhstan and The Netherlands).

² Jean-Michel Adam and Marcel Burger, Université de Lausanne (Switzerland); Fabrice Clément, Université de Genève (Switzerland); Martin J. Eppler, Università della Svizzera italiana (Switzerland); Scott Jacobs, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA); Nathalie Muller-Mirza, Université de Lausanne; Daniel J. O'Keefe, Northwestern University (USA); Daniel Perrin, Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften (Switzerland); Chris Reed, University of Dundee (UK); Louis de Saussure, Université de Neuchâtel (Switzerland); Christopher Tindale and Douglas N. Walton, University of Windsor (Canada).

³ It is the case, for instance, of Eric Nowak, Swiss Finance Institute at USI; Francesco Arcidiacono, Université de Neuchâtel; Clotilde Pontecorvo, Università Roma 3; and Eveline Feteris, University of Amsterdam.

Applications to Argupolis are possible according to the indications published on the website www.argupolis.net.

5. The Educational Program

Argupolis provides PhD students with a three-part academic orientation: first, advanced education in argumentation theory in accordance with the current state of art in the field; second, specification of the structure and dynamics of contexts; third, a possibility for each PhD student to investigate in depth the specific context of argumentation he/she is working with.

Three categories of students are currently involved in this doctoral program:

- PhD students with a background in argumentation studies who are willing to concentrate on argumentation in a specific context.
- PhD students with a background in a specific context who want to focus on the argumentative dynamics within this context.
- PhD students with a background in psychology or one of the other social sciences, familiar with the general structure and dynamics of learning and cognitive processes in contexts, who want to focus on argumentation.

In its core educational program (about 30 ECTS credits), *Argupolis* offers an array of courses (the standard course foreseeing 20 hours, including ex-cathedra teaching, discussions, exercises, peer-to-peer tutoring, work on personal scientific publications, etc.), which focus on the contextual nature of argumentation. A further relevant feature is personal or group-based tutoring that faculty members provide to students on the subject of their dissertation.

Because the specific context chosen by the PhD researchers is tailor-made to their needs, no courses on specific contexts are foreseen in the program. Each PhD student's specific contextual knowledge is developed further with the help of a co-supervisor responsible for tutoring the specific contextual domain concerned.

The program is spread over three years, each year being characterized by different educational goals:

- The first year, inaugurated in January 2009, intends to provide PhD students with the theoretical basis for their research. These courses cover the central body of the study of argumentation and the general approaches to context. Thus PhD students are confronted with the main theoretical issues of both these areas.
- The second year courses are devoted to more specific and typical issues of argumentation theory (dialogue games, argumentative manipulation, verbal instruments for argumentation, argumentation in controversies and conflictual interactions) and also include a psycho-social approach to argumentative situations and knowledge practices.
- During the third year the PhD students will mostly concentrate on their own research; the educational demands are therefore limited to deepening their existing knowledge and insights: the standard version and the extended version of Pragma-dialectics are critically compared with other theoretical approaches to argumentation and two seminars are also offered, devoted to the rhetorical approach to argumentation and to persuasion research.
- A summer school (first year, September 2009) and a winter school (second year) are devoted to the methodological⁴ aspects of argumentative analysis (fundamental methods and advanced issues respectively).

All PhD candidates participating in *Argupolis* are helped to gain a solid research experience. These students take advantage of dialogue not only with their respective thesis directors but also with all members of the core Faculty. They participate in international research and scholarly dialogues through participation in exchange programs, international conferences in the field of argumentation and in their specific contextual field and they take part in argumentation seminars and colloquia in the four involved universities. Table 1 provides an overview of the educational program.

⁴ In the Argupolis vision, it is most important that the PhD students will learn precisely how to handle data (oral and written texts, records and transcripts of interactions, ethnographic aspects) and become familiar with the methodology of argumentation analysis in the framework of discourse analysis and text analysis.

Table 1: Overview of the Educational Program

<i>Title</i>	<i>Teaching staff</i>	<i>Location</i>
Fundamentals of argumentation theory: strategic maneuvering and the analysis and evaluation of argumentative discourse	F.H. van Eemeren, B.J. Garssen	Lugano
Seminar on strategic manoeuvring	F.H. van Eemeren, B.J. Garssen	Lugano
Logic and formal dialectic	E.C.W. Krabbe	Lugano
Context, dialogue and cognition	M. Grossen	Lugano/Lausanne
Argumentation as a situated practice	N. Muller-Mirza	Lugano/Lausanne
Instruments of semantic analysis	E. Rigotti, A. Rocci	Lugano
Topics and argumentation schemes	E. Rigotti	Lugano
Seminar on argumentation analysis	E. Rigotti	Lugano
Bridging argumentation and computer sciences	D. Walton, C. Reed	Lugano
Colloquium Amsterdam-Lugano		Lugano
Summer school "Methodological issues in the analysis of verbal interactions"	M. Grossen, L. Mondada	Lugano/Lausanne
Toward a social psychology of argumentative situations and knowledge practices	A.-N. Perret-Clermont, F. Clément	Neuchâtel
Manipulation and fallacies	F. H. van Eemeren, B. J. Garssen	Lugano
Argumentation and verbal communication	A. F. Snoeck Henkemans	Lugano
Winter school "Methodological issues: semantic and pragmatic instruments for argument analysis"	A. Rocci, S. Jacobs, D. Perrin, L. de Saussure	Lugano
Dialogue games	E. Krabbe	Lugano
From difference of opinion to conflict	M. Dascal	Lugano
Seminar on visual communication supporting argumentative interaction	M. Eppler, N. Muller-Mirza	Lugano
L'analyse linguistique du discours argumentatif dans les médias	J.-M. Adam, M. Burger, A. Rocci	Lugano

Colloquium Amsterdam-Lugano		Lugano
ISSA Conference		Amsterdam
Standard and extended Pragma-dialectics in relation to other approaches to argumentation	F.H. van Eemeren, B.J. Garssen	Lugano
Seminar on rhetoric	C. Tindale	Lugano
Seminar on argumentation and persuasion	D.J. O'Keefe	Lugano
Colloquium Amsterdam-Lugano		Lugano
Final PhD conference		Amsterdam

In January 2009, the Argupolis program was inaugurated in Lugano with a module foreseeing the markedly interdisciplinary interplay of four different approaches. Michèle Grossen has introduced the topic of the interrelation between argumentation, dialogue and cognition. Nathalie Muller-Mirza has explored the situatedness of any argumentative discourse in relation to specific communicative practices activated in precise contexts of the human interaction. Frans van Eemeren and Bart Garssen have introduced the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, discussing in particular on key-notions of argumentation theory. Eddo Rigotti and Andrea Rocci have offered a crash course of semantic and text analysis, conceived of as a subservient tool necessary for arriving at a reliable argumentative analysis of real texts.

Furthermore, in April 2009, Erik Krabbe has taught a course titled "Logic and formal dialectic," devoted to the fundamentals of formal logic as a tool to support the argumentative analysis.

6. Technological Platforms Supporting the Argupolis Community

Beyond the website of the project (www.argupolis.net), on which all the Argupolis activities are presented, updates to the course program and other relevant information to the research community on argumentation in context (conferences, calls for papers, scientific results) are constantly published by the Argupolis members (students and faculty) on a dedicated blog: <http://argupolis.blogspot.com/>.

Moreover, concerning in particular the instruments used for the educational program of Argupolis, each course is supported by a dedicated eLearning module appositely created within the project Argumentum (www.argumentum.ch)⁵ to which only Faculty members and PhD students have access. On these modules, each faculty member publishes papers (to be read before or after the course in praesentia), reference lists, PowerPoint slides and other relevant learning materials.

7. Scientific Research

The organization of the research plan of Argupolis is inspired by its central tenet: the acknowledgement of the context-bound nature of argumentative activities and of the social significance of argumentation for human interaction and for the dynamics of social context within which it develops. While this core is shared by all partners and is a constitutive concern shared by all research projects of Argupolis, analysis and evaluation of argumentative practices on the one side, specific features of different interaction contexts on the other side will be addressed from two different viewpoints responding on the specific scientific background of each partner.

A first group of dissertations, building Area A – developed by Amsterdam and Lugano – examines how specific argumentative practices and moves – reasonableness conditions, appeals to ethos, evaluative premises – work in different contexts of interaction. Thus, the structure of the context is taken here as a (necessary) background to analyze communication practices and the focus is on drawing general results concerning argumentation theory.

⁵ Argumentum is a project whose impulse phase (2004–2008) has been funded by the Swiss Virtual Campus, currently providing online courses devoted to argumentation theory at the undergraduate, graduate and continuing education levels. Three partners have contributed to the development of this project: the Institute of linguistics and semiotics at USI (Eddo Rigotti, project leader, and Sara Greco Morasso, project coordinator); the University of Neuchâtel (Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont), and the University of Geneva (Franz Schultheis, currently at the University of Lausanne). The technical implementation has been possible thanks to the eLab service at USI. See Tardini (2007) and Greco Morasso (2009, forthcoming).

A second group of dissertations, building Area B – developed by Neuchâtel and Lausanne – starts from the knowledge of the different contexts – focusing in particular on children education contexts – and considers the relevance of argumentation to the dynamics of context change. A major added value of Argupolis is to promote the integration between these two approaches, not only in the training program, but also through the frequent opportunities of exchange among Faculty scholars and PhD students in seminars, workshops and scientific conferences.

7.1. Research Area A. How Argumentation works in Different Communication Contexts

The theses directed by the Amsterdam partner clearly respond to the particular theoretical commitment of the pragma-dialectical approach that is mainly aimed at the construction of a systematic and comprehensive theory of argumentation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984, 2004). The recent integration of the rhetorical component of strategic manoeuvring into the dialectical component of critical discussion explains their focus on developing research towards the activity types where argumentation is at work and their actual contexts: in particular, internet news forum, consulting and brochures in health communication, and parliamentary debates.

The theses designed by ILS in Lugano also move from a marked interest to contribute to the elaboration of a general theory of argumentation. The specific focus is on the identification of the proper role played by argumentation within the epistemological framework of communication sciences. The attention paid to context is here founded on the awareness of the context-dependency of communication dynamics and the specific interest in the contextual dimension of argument schemes (Rigotti 2006). A set of theses focuses on the analysis and evaluation of argumentative discourses in relation to the specific contexts in which they occur: family and financial markets respectively; the other set of theses contributes to the development of argumentation theory, in particular of a theory of argument schemes (topics), by focusing, on the one hand, on the argumentative keywords representing the cultural (endoxical) component of persuasion (in corporate reporting and in the debate over the new media);

and, on the other hand, on the role of modality in argumentation for economic predictions.

7.2. Research Area B. How Argumentation affects Social Interaction Contexts and its Relevance in the Dynamics of Context Change

This area deals with the development of argumentative discourse in children and in education contexts. It will contribute to (a) the description of argumentative talk in which children progressively learn to engage and their pre-requisites in terms of social and cognitive skills; (b) the identification of the contextual conditions that allow for the development of argumentative activities and sustain them; (c) the description of the conversational moves by which adults purposefully introduce children into argumentative activities; (d) the design of classroom activities that can promote learning to argue and learning via argumentation. One thesis focuses on the socially and ethically delicate issue of parents' evaluation and decision-making in relation to use of technologies of procreation.

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