Report on the outcomes of a Short-Term Scientific Mission[[1]](#footnote-1)

Action number: CA17132

Grantee name: Petar Bodlović

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| **Details of the STSM**  Title: Explanatory dialogues, arguments, and public policies  Start and end date: 15/10/2022 to 27/10/2022 |
| **Description of the work carried out during the STSM**  Description of the activities carried out during the STSM. Any deviations from the initial working plan shall also be described in this section. |
| The purpose of this STSM was to discuss some preliminary ideas about the nature of explanations and explanatory dialogues, in relation to particular practical contexts or domains where policy deliberations play an important role (such as medical and financial contexts). Initial working plan included 1) three meetings with Prof. Andrea Rocci—focusing, roughly, on discussing arguments, explanations, explanatory dialogues, and argument mining—and 2) occasional meetings with IALS staff with the goals of sharing ideas (mostly about argument annotation) and networking. All these activities have been carried out, together with some additional ones. I provide the description below.  1st three-hour-long meeting with Prof. A. Rocci (20.10.2022) focused on two questions concerning explanations and explanatory dialogues: What triggers the need for explanation (initial situation), and what is the ultimate goal of explaining, or participating in explanatory dialogue?  2nd three-hour long meeting with Prof. A. Rocci (24.10.2022) focused on analyzing the general preconditions of successful explanation (in relation to criteria of good argument), associated with the so-called opening stage of the explanatory dialogue. In particular: Should the Explainer use only the premises the Explainee understands or accepts to transfer her prior understanding?  3rd three-hour long meeting with Prof. A. Rocci (25.10.2022) focused on analysing the optimal interaction procedure between the Explainer and the Explainee (explanation stage), as well as rules for terminating the explanation dialogue (closing stage), i.e., establishing whether the transfer of understanding was successful.  Meeting with Prof. Sara Greco (20.10.2022) covered a number of topics, but mostly focused on the roles of explanation within education system and medical domain.  The purpose of the two-hour meeting with PhD researchers Costanza Lucchini and Giulia Dagostino (19.10.2022) was getting familiar with the ongoing (Lugano) project on argumentation within financial domain, and, in particular, with the software INCEpTION (used for manually annotating real-life arguments).  The purpose of the two-hour meeting with the Post-Doc researcher Olena Yaskorska (21.10.2022) was getting familiar with another software, OVA, used for manually annotating real-life dialogues.  In addition, I attended Online Ethos Seminar (20.10.2022) where A. Rocci gave presentation titled “Framing: semantic bases, tropical extensions and argumentative implications,” and PhD poster conference (26.10.2022). |
| **Description of the STSM main achievements and planned follow-up activities**  Description and assessment of whether the STSM achieved its planned goals and expected outcomes, including specific contribution to Action objective and deliverables, or publications resulting from the STSM. Agreed plans for future follow-up collaborations shall also be described in this section.  *(max. 500 words)*  This STSM achieved its planned goals. I summarize the theoretical findings below.  The 1st meeting with Rocci: there are no reasons to model explanatory dialogues only in terms of 1) the Explainee facing anomaly, 2) recognizing the gap in understanding, and 3) aiming to transfer understanding (cf. Walton 2011). Explanatory dialogues might also seek to construct or test understanding. A might want to know why the government implemented the curfew during the COVID-19 pandemic, even when this policy was expected. Also, A might want to test her own understanding of this policy by engaging in the explanatory dialogue with B who is, generally, equally knowledgeable. Rocci proposed additional literature on dialectical modelling, e.g., works by William C. Mann, and discourse relations (e.g., by Mann and Thompson).  2nd meeting with Rocci: in explanatory dialogue, understanding the explanans is not required for understanding of conclusion (cf. Walton 2011). For instance, to understand why the government implemented the curfew during the COVID-19 (instead of mandatory vaccination), the Explainee does not need to understand why exactly, e.g., curfew policy is less expensive than mandatory vaccination. However, further explanations might increase trust and motivate the Explainee to follow the proposed policy. Rocci proposed an additional literature relevant for exploring the role of explanations and understanding in one’s cognitive, practical, and social affairs, e.g., works by Sperber, Recanati, and Castelfranchi.  3rd meeting with Rocci: the explanation request does not need to be followed by giving explanation (cf. Walton 2011). Sometimes, the Explainee must motivate her explanation request, or specify the contrast class. When Explainee asks the Explainer to explain something trivial (“Why is government recommending vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic”), the Explainer might respond by demanding the explanation from the Explainee (“Why are you puzzled by this policy?”). Then the Explainer might refute the reasons motivating the Explainee and transfer understanding by eliminating obstacles. Rocci recognized that explanations might fail in two distinct ways—either by being rejected or being shown inconclusive—which have different implications for choosing public policies. These findings are relevant for normative and prescriptive studies of social controversies (WG 2, WG3).  The meeting with Lucchini and Dagostino revealed that, in corpora related to financial argumentation, there are fewer requests for arguments than explanations. That is, requests for explanations appear more cooperative and more effectively stimulate justifications in high-risk deliberation. The meeting with Yaskorska revealed advantages and disadvantages of the OVA software. OVA enables the quantitative analysis of how explanations are anchored in dialogues. This is useful to analyse how policies, in fact, arise, in correlation to the actual patterns in explanation dialogues. However, OVA shows many limitations in propositional analysis (e.g., treats narrative explanations as disconnected propositions). These findings are relevant for the empirical studies of social controversies (WG 1).  Future follow-up collaboration might include joint paper with A. Rocci (possible topics include: relationship between argument and explanation, explanations and trust, and the object of explanation), or joint paper with Lucchini and Dagostino (about the roles of explanation requests in high-risk deliberation). |

1. This report is submitted by the grantee to the Action MC for approval and for claiming payment of the awarded grant. The Grant Awarding Coordinator coordinates the evaluation of this report on behalf of the Action MC and instructs the GH for payment of the Grant. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)