

What are Opinions? Integrating Theory and Methods for Automatically Analyzing Opinionated Communication (OPINION)

MINUTES OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

COST ACTION CA21129 OPINION, 10 February 2026, University of Gdansk

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CONTENTS

1	ATTENDANCE.....	2
2	OBJECTIVES.....	2
3	AGENDA.....	3
4	WELCOME.....	3
5	CORE GROUP REPORT to the MC.....	3
6	PLANNING & NETWORK POLICIES	5
7	ANY OTHER BUSINESS	9

ACTION Status

- CSO approval: 27/05/2022
- Start date: 22/09/2022

3 AGENDA

Welcome

Core Group Report to the MC

1. State of the Network
2. Activities, Deliverables & Emerging Issues

Planning & Network Policies

3. Final Conference in Zagreb
4. Outreach & future sustainability strategy
5. Preconference at CompText
6. Grants policy in the final year
7. Publication support policy in the final year

Any Other Business

8. Summary of decisions & Closing

4 WELCOME

The MC welcomes back Aysen Simsek, our Grant Manager, who has returned from maternity leave. It also welcomes David Blanco Herrero, who follows Mariken van der Velden as WG4 Vice Chair, following an MC vote in the past GP.

5 CORE GROUP REPORT to the MC

State of the Network

COST has allocated a little bit less money to us this year than in the past. Our strategy remains to focus on meetings (the WG meetings, the Gdansk meeting, the Birmingham preconference, the final conference and COpA in Zagreb); we decreased funding for grants a bit and increased funding for open access support. The WG meetings have been roughly on or slightly above budget, the Gdansk meeting will likely be slightly cheaper than budgeted, so we are roughly on track.

Demands for grants has been receding a bit lately, and instead we are getting occasional requests for publication support of different kinds; we already factored that in for our budget plan for the final year.

WG4 has rotated one of its Vice Chairs - Mariken van der Velden has stepped down, and David Blanco Herrero has been stepping up.

We got our Grant Manager Aysen Simsek back from maternity leave, which is wonderful, as she is incredibly helpful, professional, fast, and nice.

In light of her dedication and efforts, the CG proposes to elevate Elena Negrea Busuioc, who is our Stakeholder Relations Officer (i.e., an unofficial position that we created) to be recognized as Vice Science Communication Officer and thus part of the Core Group. This enables Elena to formally participate in all CG activities and discussions, it completes the doubling strategy that we have for all other jobs in the CG by also creating a two-people team in charge of Science Communication (our SCO is Ana Milojevic), and it gives her a better line for her CV.

The Management Committee supports the motion, however, as no quorum is reached, there will be a formal vote online.

We have largely stopped growing, we currently have 236 members from 42 countries. That is not because we stopped getting applications - we still get three, four per month - but because the WGs have increasingly applied stricter standards, as there isn't really that much left to contribute: We now mostly accept people for three reasons: A clear focus on learning from us; a strong relevant profile paired with an awareness that we are in our 4th year; and practical reasons (we recently admitted Regina Seiwald, U of Birmingham, so she can act as our local host there).

The Management Committee supports the shift in admission policy.

Deliverables

WG1 has completed and published its literature review and glossary (D1.1) as well as its manifesto (D1.2), all available on the website. The book (D1.3) is in progress and due by the end of the funding year.

WG2 has built its inventory of tools (D2.1), the joint publication on strategies (redefined as a paper; D2.2) is basically there, and the final deliverable - teaching materials and tutorials (D2.3) - is a growing compendium of materials that have accrued also through the COpAs; however, AI has reshuffled things quite a bit for WG2, so our dominant strategy is to argue that WG2 deliverables need to be redefined because the key methodological challenges with AI are different from what we anticipated in the proposal.

The Management Committee acknowledges that while the outcomes of WG2 differ a bit from what was anticipated in the MoU, there are numerous important outcomes that clearly meet and exceed expectations.

For D3.1, WG3 is contributing to and participating in OPTED's Meteor system (which is presently being rebranded and integrated into MeDem); but for D3.2 (gold standards) and D3.3 (the Computational Communication Lab), it will not be able to complete the deliverables as anticipated. There are some outputs, but they will be different from what was anticipated. Similarly to WG2, AI has changed the needs of the field, so maintaining large tool repositories and tutorial sets makes less sense today, while collaborating with MeDem will offer a much larger effort at creating infrastructure; however, in terms of deliverables as laid down in the MoU, this will fall short.

The Management Committee acknowledges the specific situation of WG3 and agrees that pursuing the remaining deliverables as anticipated before AI changed things makes limited sense.

WG4 is on track: The first deliverable was the website (D4.1), which we created notably earlier than expected and keep expanding; the Inclusion Strategy White Paper (D4.2) is published on our website, and the WG is working toward making recommendations for training (D4.3).

Overall, we have a growing flurry of articles that come out of OPINION via different smaller collaborations, so in terms of outcomes, we are quite pleased with the situation.

The Management Committee approves of the activity report.

6 PLANNING & NETWORK POLICIES

Plans for the Final Conference in Zagreb

A task force dedicated to planning the final conference in Zagreb has proposed the following rough structure for the meeting:

Day 1 will be focused on wrapping up activities within the network. This will include one or two sessions in a microconference format, presenting the latest scientific outcomes of the network's activities; one plenary session for distilling key learnings and identifying collective agenda items based on four years of network activities (in an inclusive, interactive format); and one session dedicated to discussing grant applications and project plans that are emerging from the network, including matchmaking and workshoping strategies.

Day 2 will be focused on generating outreach and impact beyond the network. For this purpose, we will invite external stakeholders in three primary circles: First, a handful of high-profile individuals who will participate in roundtable discussions; second, a selection of (mostly regional) key stakeholders for on-site participation; and third, a wide audience of stakeholders across and beyond Europe to join the event online. The program will include one session of outcome presentations focused on new data, conclusions and insights that arise from empirical studies conducted by the network, reframed for public accessibility; two roundtable discussions (half internal, half external participants; tentatively, focused on toxic opinion expression and ways of identifying and managing it; and on polarized or contested public opinion corridors and their impact on political discourse and democratic society); and one session focused on learnings in a prescriptive sense, recommendations for concepts, techniques, ethics and resources in the study of opinionated communication.

Additional outcomes of the network will be presented as posters, framed in a perspective relevant and accessible to the public.

The Management Committee supports the proposed direction.

Outreach and future sustainability

Two taskforces focused on outreach activities and the sustainability of the network proposed to focus the utilization of current outcomes of the network by mapping outputs on stakeholders for targeted dissemination; creating higher visibility for the wider outcomes (notably, the manifesto and the White Paper); and rendering less accessible outcomes more transparent by changing their presentation and format. Our Podcast "Observing Opinions" is by now well underway (<https://aboutccs.net/opinion/>), with 8 episodes published, and more underway, acting as an easy point of entry for new researchers who wish to enter the world of text-based opinion research.

For future sustainability, outcomes can be fed into enduring, actively managed knowledge bases, such as GESIS' collection of digital behavioral data knowledge, and MeDem's resources. Furthermore, the taskforce suggests shifting communications

We may have slightly fewer interest in STSMs and conference grants, but it still exceeds what we budgeted. We have so far elected to be generous, partly with the thought that collaborations that happen now are more valuable to the network, as they can still generate outcomes we can use, than collaborations closer to the end; and partly in anticipation that meetings (especially the big ones) tend to be a bit cheaper than budgeted, so we can shift funds to grants afterwards. However, a situation may arise where we run out of funds. In that event, we can simply prioritize

by merit until funds are gone; or we can add criteria (e.g., prioritizing dissemination events, prioritizing events that contribute to the longevity of the networks we created, ...).

The Management Committee recommends spending the available funds for grants on eligible projects as they come, without trying to reserve funds for the later collection dates.

Publication support policy in the final year

We have already supported one publication (led by Ljubisa Bojic, in Nature Scientific Reports) in the past, and there are a few items that are earmarked for this grant period (most significantly, the WG1 book). We likely won't have funds to cover all requests.

In the past, we adopted an OA support policy, which adopts an all-or-nothing approach to supporting publications, stipulates some criteria, and establishes an application procedure. Still, it is very difficult to plan what will come and what costs will be involved, so we might need additional policies that help decide some things.

We do have one request for clarification from MC members Lenka Vochocova and Gabriella Szabo, who are preparing a CEJC special issue entitled "Cringe Culture in Politics: Exploring Humour, Vulnerability, and Ridicule in the Digital Age," based a conference panel that they organized, and asked whether OPINION can support this open access publication as it would with regular article publications. The CG proposes to treat the Special Issue as a legitimate form of publication in the sense of our OA policy, which means that the applicants would be eligible to request funding.

The Management Committee agrees. The specification will be made known to the network.

In terms of prioritization, we could specify that the same lead author can only apply once, which might help spread funds more widely, but forcing the most productive authors, who give us the most visibility, to choose. We could also add a criterion for high-impact publications, but that may mean that some of the less well-established authors who need our support the most can't benefit. So there are some trade-offs.

The Management Committee suggests not to add additional criteria and rather spend the available funds on a first-come-first-served basis until funds are extinguished.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There is no other business.