

*Abstract for the Work-in-progress Workshop on Feb 28*

**A Nazi analogy in action: The argumentative power of analogies in lay talk about nanotechnology**

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In my dissertation project I analyse how Austrian lay people talk about nanotechnologies in discussion groups, in order to gain a better understanding of the discursive processes in public engagement settings. My analysis focuses on comparison processes that emerge frequently in such settings and which I capture analytically with the notion of analogical discourse. Empirically, I explore how analogies and other analogical means such as metaphors are co-constructed in discourse. For this purpose, I conceptualize analogies as double-sided devices that can do both, fire and restrict imagination: On the one hand, they can be important tools for learning and making sense of new phenomena such as nanotechnology, but they can simultaneously act as persuasive means in discourse that can frame or even end debate. In this talk I will focus on this second persuasive power of analogical arguments, which brings the performative role of analogies in discourse, as well as the power structures and struggles over discursive authority into view. I will also argue that analogies can work in subtle ways by transferring affective and tacit aspects from one case onto another. To exemplify these points, I will present a sequence from a discussion group on nanomedicine, in which the vision of DNA-repair was discussed controversially. By walking you through my analysis, we will reconstruct how a Nazi analogy was employed successfully to counter a “breakthrough” metaphor. Reflections on the risks of and potential ways of dealing with such powerful analogies will end the talk.