Discursive Actor Attribution Analysis: A Tool to Analyze How People Make Sense of the Eurozone Crisis

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Abstract

A crisis situation is marked by a fundamental questioning of routines, structures and established action patterns. The Eurozone Crisis is clearly a crisis in this sense. Making sense of such a crisis is pressing for a society and difficult at the same time as established interpretations are questioned as well. Analyzing the process of interpreting a crisis is of major importance because the interpretations pave the way to future decisions. At the same time it is a methodological challenge for a standardized approach because researchers cannot rely on already established arguments and interpretive frames. With the discursive actor attribution analysis, we propose a tool to analyze a contentious discourse without relying on established frames. Looking at attributions of responsibility as the backbone of making sense in a political contention we provide a structure for data collection *without* predefining combinations of arguments and evaluations to which the material is assigned. The discursive actor attribution analysis is based on content analysis tools from social movement studies, i.e. protest event analysis, frame analysis and political claim analysis, and analysis of responsibility attribution. It forms a new approach which has the advantage of including many of the merits of the aforementioned perspectives but does not rely on predefined argumentative structures. The paper introduces the discursive actor attribution analysis with reference to existing approaches and reports on some experiences in its application in a Greek-German project on analyzing the discourse on the Eurozone crisis.

1. Introduction

In 2009, the Eurozone entered a societal crisis. Within a few weeks politicians, market actors and the public in whole realized that the public budgets, the financial and economic system in the Eurozone are in fundamental trouble. On the markets unusual activities extended the formerly usual margins (e.g. rapid rise of interest rates for some state bonds), politics reacted with crisis meetings on weekends and unforeseen measures like the EFSF/ESM and austerity measures never imposed on some countries in totally new scales.[1]

What exactly makes this dramatic situation a "societal crisis"? Under the term "societal crisis" we understand *an unusual situation which is temporarily limited in which societal structures of general impact are perceived to be questioned and unstable*. This definition is based on discussions dating back before the Eurozone crisis. Core of this definition is the assumption of change (Hay 1999: 318; Kreps 2001: 3718) with an impact on fundamental structures of the society (Friedrichs 2007: 14; Habermas 1973: 39f.). The definition of crisis is embedded in an understanding of the phenomenon as a societal phenomenon in two senses. Firstly, it has to affect the society or large parts of it (geographically or in terms of functional subsystems, see Koselleck 1976: 1240; Kreps 2001: 3718). Secondly, it has to be perceived as such (Friedrichs 2007: 14; Hay 1999: 319f.; Kreps 2001: 3718f.; Pearson and Clair 1998: 36). A social situation only becomes a societal crisis if it is perceived to question societal structures of general impact. As long as changes are perceived as such, no societal crisis in this sense is around.[2]

A crisis situation by definition implies the need to make sense of what is going on. The situation is (perceived as) new, usual interpretations and action patterns seem to be inadequate. Sense making is the first task in a crisis situation. This sense making is an individual task but even more so a social one. Societies have to come to terms with the new situation. They have to figure out what is at stake, what is going on, what should be done by whom but also – in close relation with the other questions – what and who has caused the crisis.

Public sense making is nothing unusual. Quite on the contrary, interpretations of what is going on and what should be done are taking place all the time. However, beyond crisis situations people can refer to established interpretation frames which tend to be stable and the flow of events is ordered according to the usual perspectives (Chong and Druckman 2007a; Entman 1993). Sense making is business as usual. Changes in the established interpretation

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[1] The literature on the crisis, its reasons, developments and effects is growing rapidly and keeps to be outdated shortly after the point of publishing (Buti/Carnot. 2012, Featherston 2011, Illing 2013, Lane 2012, Schuppan 2013). The most recent information and interpretations will rather be available on this conference.
[2] Of course, the changes or developments can have catastrophic impact on the society already. However, the term crisis is here reserved to the situation of *perceived* change questing fundamental structures in society.

frames are the exception and need particular circumstances. A societal crisis is one of these particular circumstances.

The process of public sense making is not a classical academic task with all the specificities of academic reasoning. Rather this public sense making has to be quick, has to convince the layperson, and powerful actors will have better chances to influence the public understanding – as long as they have made sense of the situation themselves and developed preferences. The mechanisms of news selection and news coverage influence public sense making as well as factors such as prominence, power, ascribed competence etc.

The result of this process is highly influential. Assumptions about the character of and reasons for a problem will guide the measures to tackle it. In a crisis situation the chances of taking harsh and disruptive measures is higher than usual, and therefore the impact of interpretations is high. The interpretation of a crisis is highly influential for further developments. It paves the way to discursive opportunities (Koopmans and Olzak 2004; Snow 2007) for political actors and leads to policy measures. Depending on the size of the crisis, it can even modify the societal cleavage structure or establish new cleavages (Kriesi 1998; Rokkan 1975).

The Eurozone crisis evoked not only interest in the crisis itself but also in the public sense making of the crisis. A number of studies asked how the Eurozone crisis (or parts and aspects of it) have been framed in the public (Bickes et al. 2012; Knight 2013; Lodge and Wegrich 2011; Mylonas 2012; Schmidt 2014; Tracy 2011; Tsoukala 2013; Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou and Exadaktylos 2014). The studies are mostly qualitative, focusing on the specific case. They reconstruct inductively narratives and typical perspectives. Often these studies have a clear normative leaning, criticizing especially the tabloid press (Bickes et al. 2012; Mylonas 2012).

That theory testing and quantitative studies are currently missing may in part be due to the difficulties to come to terms with a standardized analysis of complex content. Therefore in this paper we want to present an approach to grasp the core of public sense making in an issue field: the discursive actor attribution analysis. We aim at providing a tool for a standardized analysis to quantitatively map the core of controversial sense making. Though this tool is by no means limited to crisis situations or to analyzing the Eurozone crisis, we pay particular attention to this application. This is not only because we refined our instrument in respect to this case but also because the interpretation of a crisis situation is particularly demanding for a standardized instrument as it cannot rely on well established and generally known frames or interpretation patterns. Rather the tool has to deal with the openness of the debate. This particular context also highlights difficulties which are less obvious (but nevertheless existent) in more established debates.

In the following, we review shortly content analysis methods in a relevant field, i.e. social movement studies (chapter 2). To extend and at the same time further specify the approach we add insights from the research on attribution of responsibility (chapter 3). Amalgamating these two backgrounds, we present our suggestion: the discursive actor attribution analysis as a tool to grasp core aspects of a public debate in a standardized way (chapter 4). In the end we

report some first experiences with the application of the tool (chapter 5) and a short conclusion.

2. Approaches from Social Movement Studies

For our discussion we choose the analysis of public debates in social movement research as a starting point. Social movement research is particularly interested in situations where established interpretations are questioned and challenged (by social movements). Though this is not per se a crisis situation for a society the perspective and research interest is somewhat similar. Social movements challenge established interpretations and propose alternative world views. What has been taken-for-granted, is challenged by a social movement resulting in an openness of sense making. This situation is similar to a crisis situation. Looking at research on social movements is an opportunity for insights also applicable in a crisis situation. We take a closer look at the methodological instruments employed in this context, i.e. frame analysis and protest event analysis.

2.1 Frame Analysis

Framing is one of the approaches to explain the emergence of social movements, which has gained a somewhat classical status (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow 2007). The basic idea of the approach is that an adequate problem interpretation and a strategic introduction of arguments is decisive for the chance to mobilize a large constituency for a social movement. Linking the movement issue to established fundamental values and the frames of other relevant groups broadens the spectrum of potential supporters (Snow and Benford 1988; Snow et al. 1986).

While at first the perspective concentrated on links between different constituencies (Snow et al. 1986), later efforts concentrated on specifying the structure of a movement frame. Snow and Benford (1986) suggested three constitutive parts of a frame: the diagnostic frame, the prognostic frame and motivational frame. Snow and Benfords conceptualization was used in some studies (see also Donati 1992; Johnston 1995; e.g. Kliment 1994). The framing concept inspired some studies which primarily referred to the core arguments of the approach and then provided qualitative descriptions of frames and difficulties in frame alignments (Gamson 1992; Gamson and Stuart 1992; Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Kliment 1994; McAdam 1994).

As a general perspective, the idea of framing started a career beyond social movement studies and was employed in media analysis in general. While the focus on enhancing mobilization potential by framing was abandoned the basic idea of social reality as interpreted in a broader framework of causal and normative relations, linking phenomena with norms, values, causes and actors became part of media analysis (overviews are provided by Chong and Druckman 2007a; classically Entman 1993; Iyengar 1991; Scheufele 1999). Research questions discussed in relation to framing are ways of aligning (new) topics with the political leaning of

a media outlet or effects of framing on the reception by the audience (e.g. Chong and Druckman 2007b; Iyengar 1991). Framing analysis in media studies uses either very general distinctions (e.g. politically left-right, personal vs. scientific analytical frame) in experimental designs or content analysis, or qualitative descriptions of the development of a story are provided (e.g. Junge 2002; MacGregor 2003).

The advantage as well as the problem of the framing approach is its conceptual openness. While the basic idea is of major importance for understanding processes of mobilization in the wider context of social movement research as well as understanding of sense making in the media and by media audience, the practical application of the approach is only vaguely specified. Because frames are by definition complex webs of causal links, moral judgments and selective involvement of actors, frames are difficult to grasp. Especially in media reporting, which is often though not always the basis for frame analysis, information is fragmented and assumes prior knowledge of the audience. Accordingly, the reconstruction of frames in many cases involves considerable interpretative input by the researcher, especially in standardized procedures which have to confine a unit of analysis and thereby limit the linked interpretation of various information bits.[3]

Two basic types solutions in standardized content analysis have been proposed. First, in research projects the relevant frames have been specified by the researchers in a general knowledge of the debate. The coding task is then to assign arguments and positions in the material to the predefined frames. The problem with this approach is that the available information to be coded has only little information on the actual framing of which it is a part of. The assignment to a frame is a tricky task which may be prone to considerable error. This is a general problem of content analysis, especially if more complex content is coded. The more specific problem of frame analysis is the process of defining the frames in the first place. Here, researchers have to rely on their prior – though of course informed – knowledge and judgment on the composition of frames. Modifications and changes of frames, realignments of parts of the interpretation or other biases, like logically consistent frames composed by researchers in their rationalized thinking, are fairly likely and a fundamental problem of frame analysis. As part of this general problem the separation of frames, the decision of assuming one or two frames or one frame with a particular subframe etc. is generally unsolved in framing analysis.[4]

To tackle the problem of specifying frames, the research project by Feree et al. (2002; Gerhards, Neidhardt and Rucht 1998; see also Gerhards and Schäfer 2006; Schäfer 2007)

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[3] Just to mention the well known arguments of the qualitative-quantitative debate: A more inclusive approach with reference to broad range of material which is linked in the interpretation process is not necessarily a better option as the way of linking scattered information also involves a good deal of interpretation by the researcher.

[4] To some extent systems theory can provide a solution for this problem. Referring to the inductive systems theory approach by Niklas Luhmann (1984, 1997) distinguishing functional social subsystems by a specific logic of operation, we can distinguish frames by reference to different systemic logics. However, this solution helps only to distinguish frames on a very general level. For more specific frames choosing different interpretations which remain within one system logic other solutions have to be found.

coded "idea elements" as the smallest subunit of an argument. The universe of possible arguments was collected inductively from a broad variety of sources related to the focal issue. Coding the actual press coverage meant linking the reported statements to idea elements only, which is a less demanding interpretation process (though of course still an interpretation process). This approach reduces the conceptual input by researchers and thereby reduces the potential bias due to the researchers perception of the public interpretation which may be not completely adequate. On the other hand, it complicates the coding process considerably and still relies on a predefined realm of possible arguments in the material. This predefined realm of possible argument, in which way ever derived, leaves a strong imprint on the measurement.

Both approaches, prior definition of frames or collection of idea elements, rely in their procedure on the availability of prior knowledge of a discourse. This is of course in many cases no relevant limitation. Many political debates, and probably even more so debates involving public conflict and protest mobilization, are fought between mostly well established and refined positions known by the actors involved. Looking at limited issues such as the abortion discourse or the handling of migrants, arguments have been exchanged for a long time and it is extremely unlikely that completely new ideas or judgments, i.e. completely new arguments and interpretations, arise in the discourse. Even a realignment of positions or argumentative chains may be very unlikely. Accordingly, predefining idea elements or even more complex frames may be adequate and the prior knowledge of well informed researchers may not deviate from the knowledge of informed journalists or participants in the discourse.[5] However, in cases, where the interpretation of an issue is by and large open and hitherto unknown events and developments need to be interpreted, things look different. In these cases, we need to look for different ways to grasp the discourse in its complexity and instability.

2.2 Protest Event Analysis and Political Claims Making

A different tradition in social movement research which applies content analysis is protest event analysis.[6] The core of this approach is to capture the dynamic of demands voiced publicly. Classically protest event studies focused on public contentious activities by collective actors. This included often as different actions as signature collections, petitions, demonstration marches, strikes, hunger strikes, assassinations and many more. The method grasps the core public activity of social movements which is one of their defining aspects as a particular kind of political actor. From this analysis we learn more about the dynamics of mobilizations and macro conditions enhancing or hindering protest mobilization.

Protest event data allow for the study of contentious politics through time, visualized for example in protest waves or cycles and discussed in terms of the opportunities and constraints they face. The subsequent political claims analysis as well as protest case analysis have

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[5] Of course on methodological grounds the problem of potential bias remains and it is just a rough guess that frames by involved actors, journalists and researchers are in fact mostly identical.

[6] Koopmans and Rucht (2002) provided a careful overview on the approach and its developments including methodological problems.

incorporated and expanded the claims' repertoire, not only that of mobilizing groups, but those of their opponents as well as their supporters (Koopmans and Statham 1999, Kousis 1998, Statham et al 2005). 'Protest case analysis', a content analysis method that compiles information from newspapers on five series of data: location, events, groups, time, and issue-claim linkages incorporates elements of public discourse analysis (Eder 1996) by coding the claim and counter-claim repertoires for all actors involved in a given conflict, tracing the respective claims on the cause, offenses and impacts (Kousis 1998, 1999). While the first large protest event projects were rich on protest activity, radicality, locality and organizational basis, the actual content of the demands articulated in these events remained in the background (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam 1990 (orig. 1982); Neidhardt and Rucht 1999; Rucht 1998). The protest issues provided a broad categorization but the content of the demands and accordingly the contributions to a public discourse were not targeted by this method.

Political discourse analysis, associated with the constructivist framing perspective (Gamson and Modigliani 1989), is a methodological approach which also uses news and document data to study activism (Koopmans and Statham, 1999). Focused on movement "frames" as indicators of the "meaning contents" and their visibility in the public sphere it emphasizes dominant political and cultural norms. Although different in focus, both approaches study a dimension of collective mobilization in the public domain as a key variable for explaining the process of political change (Kousis 2007).

According to Koopmans and Statham (1999) the synthesis of the two approaches allows for the study of both discursive and institutional contextual variables, using primary data. They apply the hybrid method in their international comparative project on Mobilization on Ethnic Relations, Citizenship and Immigration (MERCI). Extending the protest event design, they switch the focus from "protest" to "political claims making", and from "movement" to "multi-organizational field," coding all actions by all actors which are relevant to their political issue field (Koopmans and Statham, 1999). Following Franzosi (1999), they point to the importance of mapping the relationships between actors, which facilitates the understanding of the dynamic process of a political conflict and the identification of shifting alliances and oppositions between actors (Koopmans and Statham, 1999).

Koopmans and Statham (1999) thus extended the protest event analysis to a political claim analysis. They discarded the limitation on collective non-state actors which were focused by former protest event studies which were only interested in social movement activity. The protest event analysis covers all kinds of political actors who make "strategic demands (…) within a specific contested issue field" (Koopmans and Statham 1999: 206). Furthermore, studies applying political claims analysis tended to code reasons given for the claim (if available). Technically, the coding of reasons is the assignment of reasons found in the material (often press outlets) to frames (see e.g. Koopmans and Statham 1999: 207). The problems of standardized frame analysis discussed above (2.1) apply also to this coding.

Koopmans and Statham political claims analysis combines the techniques of frame analysis and protest event analysis (1999: 219) in the MERCI project. More recent examples include large projects such as UNEMPOL (Cinalli & Giugni 2010) EURISLAM (Giugni & Cinalli 2013). All actors who put forward a demand for action publicly are included in the analysis. The full variety of participants in a public discourse now appear in the analysis with their respective claims. Also the form of articulating a demand is less restricted than in protest event analysis, as political claims analysis also includes routine forms of public announcements by fully institutionalized actors. Finally, reasons are included in the form of frame references.

All in all the political claims analysis reduces the gap between protest event analysis and discourse analysis. However, the approach is still influenced by the protest event analysis tradition as it limits its interest to calls for action, mostly political action. Political demands are the units of analysis while diagnosis and prognosis only appear in related arguments. An analysis of public sense making needs to include these kinds of demands, but more attention could be devoted to diagnosis and prognosis as they legitimize and delegitimize actors and strategies, and thereby pave the way to future demands and future actions. It is not only the responsibility to take action in the future, but also the responsibility for past and future developments based on taken action are crucial to understand the sense making of a situation. This is why we first turn the analysis of attribution of responsibility before we proceed to our method.

3. Logic of Attribution of Responsibility

The attribution of responsibility can be seen as a higher level framework for different aspects of framed social movement action. Calling for political action implies an attribution of responsibility. Responsibility for the action is attributed to the addressed political actor. Thus, protest itself can be understood as a form of attributing responsibility.

Looking at the frame, as proposed in social movement research, other kinds of responsibility attributions come to the fore. The diagnostic frame does not only describe a situation as such but also marks the actors who have caused the problem. This blaming is again a form of attribution of responsibility. The blamed actor is made responsible for the problem. The diagnostic frame can also take a predictive perspective in the sense that something will happen in the future in case a problem is not tackled now. Climate change is a case in point. Hence, an actor is blamed to cause a future problem. The prognostic frame describes the responsibility for a future improvement which would be caused by the addressed actor if he/she took the actions called for. Finally, the motivational frame ascribes responsibility to the social movement. It explains why the movement is in charge of bringing the desired change around. The core aspects of frames can be understood as forms of attributing responsibility.

The attribution of responsibility is a social construction. Every situation and phenomenon has multiple necessary conditions, i.e. causes, and the action of multiple actors is always necessary for these causes. Additionally, there are even more actors whose inaction is also a necessary condition for something to happen or exist. To mark an actor as responsible is therefore always a specific selection which – in principle – could have been done differently with equal factual validity. Of course, we have cultural rules and laws of accountability and responsibility but these are already part of the social construction and most of the problems, societies refer to as problems such as unemployment, demographic change, climate change, discrimination etc., are much more complex and "objectively" responsible actors are impossible to identify. The attribution of responsibility to actors is therefore always a choice among many possible choices.

Attribution of responsibility as such attracted only limited research interest though it is embedded in multiple research (such as frame analysis mentioned above). Weaver (1986) pointed out the importance of blame avoidance as a political tactic. In his classical contribution, he discussed various possible strategies political actors could choose to avoid blame. These ideas inspired some discussions on strategies of blame avoidance and resulting pathologies of inner organizational behavior (Bovens 1998; Hood 2011). The focus of these studies has been on the behavior of office holders within institutional settings and organizational design. The contributions relate the attribution of responsibility to organization studies rather than public discourse.

Hood (2011: 6) conceptualizes blame as the combination of "a perceived avoidable harm or loss in a time" together with "perceived responsibility of an actor" at that time point. Generalizing from Hoods proposition by including also positive outcomes we can conceptualize attribution of responsibility as a link between a positively or negatively valued fact and an actor whose (non-)actions are regarded the cause of this effect. The attribution of responsibility merges the valuation of the fact with the valuation of the actor. Hood points out that this combination is time specific and the fact or the evaluation of the fact can change as well as the perceived responsibility. This underlines again the socially constructed nature of responsibility attribution.

Recently, the public attribution of responsibility attracted some research. Gerhards, Offerhaus and Roose analyzed the attribution of responsibility in the context of EU routine politics (Gerhards, Offerhaus and Roose 2007; 2009; Gerhards, Roose and Offerhaus 2013). The guiding interest was whether the EU is used as a scapegoat in the national political debate as EU institutions are involved in many policies but their standing in the national media is weak. As the EU commission is not elected it is especially convenient as a scapegoat. This research focused on the public attribution of responsibility and tried to understand the patterns of choosing addressees for blame. The content analysis instrument for attribution analysis (Gerhards, Offerhaus and Roose 2007) was taken up by a research group around Daniel Kübler and Frank Marcinkowski, who were interested in the delegation of political decisions to non-elected agencies (Christmann et al. 2013; Greuter 2014; Hasler et al. 2013).

The experiences of these projects were important in designing and applying the discursive actor attribution analysis.

4. Discursive Actor Attribution Analysis

The discursive actor attribution analysis (DAAA) is an instrument for the standardized measurement of the backbone of a controversial discourse. It amalgamates frame analysis and protest event analysis. In this sense it is similar to political claims analysis. However, the unit of analysis is not restricted to claims but is more inclusive. The discursive actor attribution analysis is primarily designed for coding newspaper reporting, but can also be adapted to coding other material like other media reporting (TV or radio), press releases, programmatic papers, websites etc. The three core elements of the coding process are the attribution itself, reasons given for the actor attribution and the context in which an actor attribution is stated. These three elements are introduced in turn.

4.1 Actor Attribution

The actor attribution is the core unit of analysis. In its basic form, it contains the information to the question: "Who makes whom publicly responsible for what?" It is the combination of an attribution sender (AS) stating the attribution, an attribution addressee (AA) to whom the attribution is directed, and the attribution issue (AI). These three parts are linked in the guiding question: Who (AS) makes whom (AA) publicly responsible for what (AI)?" This trias forms the core of an actor attribution (figure 1).
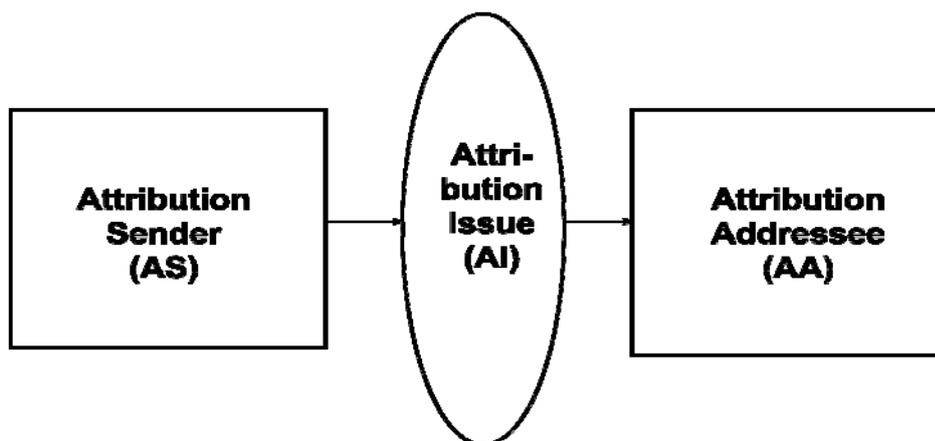

Figure 1: Attribution Trias (adapted from Gerhards, Offerhaus and Roose 2007: 111)

Actor attribution occurs permanently in social reality and in reporting on this reality. All witnessed action can be regarded as an actor attribution: as soon as a spectator (sender) sees/reports the action of an actor (addressee) with a content (issue), we would have an actor

attribution. Also, in societies we have in many cases a clear understanding of who (addressee) is in charge of doing what (issue). Mentioning (sender) such by and large consensual responsibilities, regardless whether they are based in law or cultural rules, would again constitute an actor attribution. However, the discursive actor attribution approach only relates to *discursive* incidents of actor attribution. That means subject of analysis are only instances of actor attribution in which the issue and addressee are evaluated. The discursive actor attribution analysis is therefore limited to those cases in which the attribution becomes the issue of a debate. It focuses on the public presentation and exchange of interpretations and attributions in cases where the attribution is not taken for granted. Therefore we called our approach the d*iscursive* actor attribution analysis.

Actor attributions can appear in different forms. Blame as a kind of classical form establishes a causal link between the attribution addressee and the fact which is negatively evaluated. Praise or credit in the classical sense would be identical except a positive evaluation. However, blame and credit can not only be diagnostic but also be prognostic, i.e. the addressee is blamed/credited for an expected fact in the future. These kinds of attributions are causal as they regard the attribution addressee as having caused the evaluated attribution issue. Alternatively, the addressee can be called to action. These requests are request attributions as they not only want something to happen but the request is directed at an actor making specifically this actor responsible for the action to be taken. This form of responsibility attribution is at the centre of the political claims analysis. While the request attributions call for a specific action, the competence attribution is the ascription of a general competence for action beyond the specific case.

Taken the different forms of attribution together we derive an attribution tree which distinguishes ten kinds of actor attributions altogether. The relation between attribution addressee and attribution issue can be a causal relationship (i.e. the addressee causes the issue), a request (i.e. the addressee should act in regards to a specific issue) or a generally attributed competence (i.e. the addressee should be in charge of handling issues like this in general). The causal relationship can be directed to the presence and past as diagnostic or to the future as prognostic, while the other relationships are necessarily prognostic. All these attributions can be positively or negatively evaluated. For the causal attributions we also allow for ambivalent attributions which discuss positive as well as negative aspects. Proposals and calls for action are by nature unidirectional.[7] The kinds of actor attributions are summarized in figure 2.[8]

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[7] In the project on attributions of responsibility in routine EU politics, for competence attributions an ambivalent evaluation was also possible for the coders but practically never used.

[8] While causal attributions and competence attributions were already part of the concept by Gerhards et al. (2007), the request attribution was added. To our understanding the request attribution is a crucial kind of attribution in cases of controversial issues. It is the attribution kind which links the concept of responsibility attribution to political claims analysis and embeds political claims analysis in the broader actor attribution analysis. Also, in the Gerhards et al.-project the coding distinguished between the attribution of responsibility (i.e. the actors is made responsible) and the rejection of an attribution of responsibility (i.e. an actor negates being responsible). In the analysis, however, attributions were always combined according to the implication

The actor attribution forms the core unit of analysis. Therefore the identification of actor attributions and decisions about identifying one or several actor attributions are of major importance. These issues are discussed in extent in our codebook which will be published on the project website www.ggcrisi.info. Some of these questions are also shortly discussed in section 5.

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on the addressee. Accordingly, attribution of blame and rejection of success were taken together as negative implication for the addressee, and attribution of success and rejection of blame were taken together as positive implication for the addressee. To slightly simplify a coding process which is already quite complicated we decided to combine the two options (attribution of blame+rejection of success/attribution of success+rejection of blame) already in the coding process.
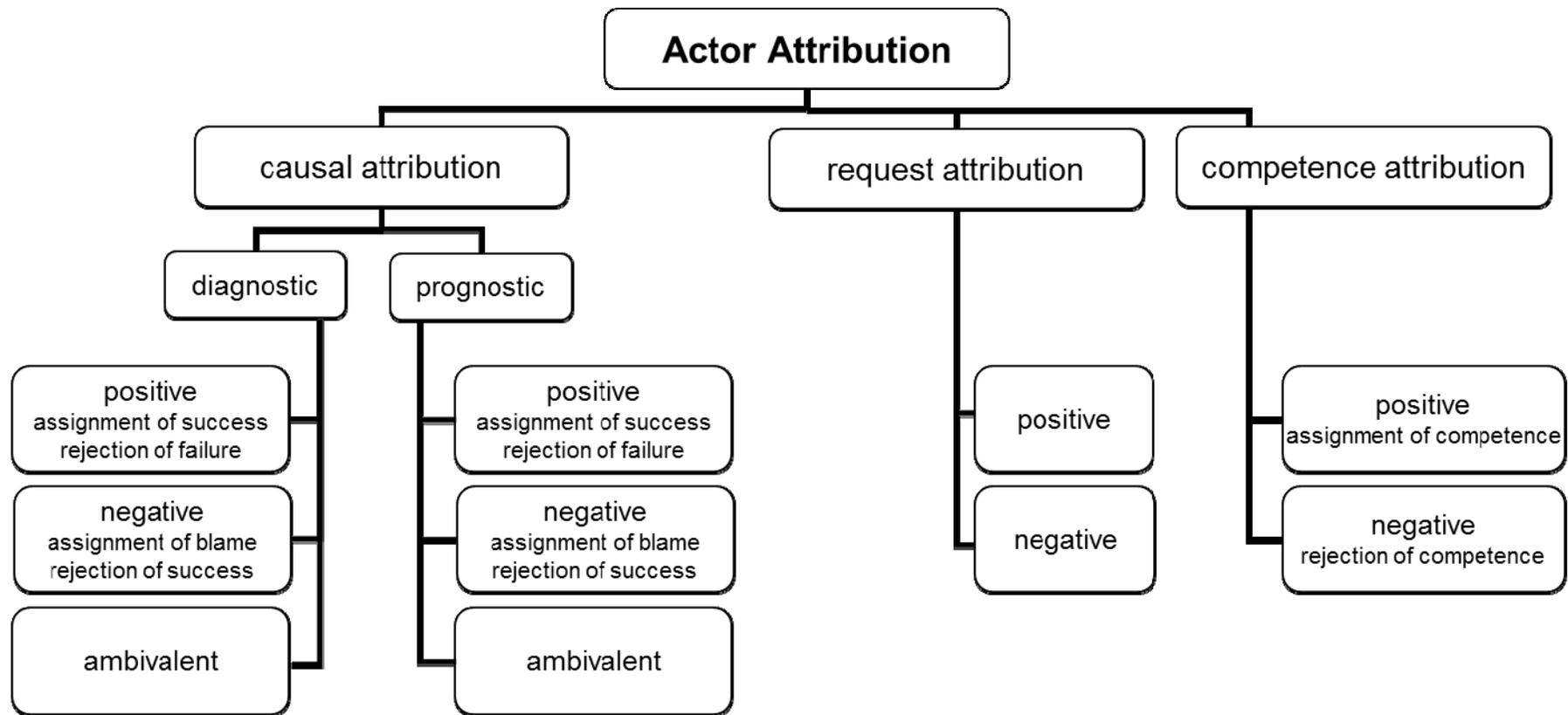
Figure 2: Attribution Tree – Overview (adapted from Gerhards, Offerhaus and Roose 2007: 116)

4.2 Reasons

The discursive actor attribution analysis is an actor focused approach. The actor attribution specifies the evaluated relationship between an actor (attribution addressee) and an issue (attribution issue) as presented by the attribution sender. While the attribution issue is included, further and more complex sense making of the How and Why is not part of this unit of analysis. Thereby the attribution analysis is considerably different to the frame analysis which tries to grasp the content of sense making in some complexity.

The discursive actor attribution analysis does not want to turn back the clock but still we covered more content of the sense making by including reasons given for actor attributions. While sticking with the core unit of analysis, the actor attribution, The coding of reasons provides a new perspective on justificatory argumentation. Including "reasons" means opening up the analysis for an endless multitude of possible content, figures of speech, forms of presentation etc. (see Tilly 2006). A clear conceptualization (and reduction of complexity) is inevitable.

As the actor attribution is our core unit of analysis, we only consider reasons which are given for this particular actor attribution. We extend the core question specifying the coded material to: "Who makes whom publically responsible for what, **based on which reason**?"

The link of reasons to the actor attribution not only singles out particular given reasons out of the broad realm of propositions and interpretations which could qualify as reasons. It also helps to specify the structure of the reasons. The reasons for actor attributions are linked to the evaluation of the attribution. There are two possible structures, two kinds of reasons for the evaluation of the actor attribution which are adjacent to the two linked parts of an attribution (cf. section 3 and Hood 2011: 6): object-related reasons and actor related reasons.[9]

An object-related reason qualifies why the action result is negative or positive, why the result is a harm/loss or a favor/gain. The object-related reason refers to a cause-effect chain where the cause is the addressee's handling of an issue (AI) which has an effect on the reason content. The causal chain links the action of the responsible actor (AA) causally to the effect (or some out of more effects) of this action which is then linked to an outcome, which is positively or negatively evaluated.[10]

An object-related reason is structured as follows: the content of the reason is causally influenced by the action result of the responsible actor (which can be found in the attribution issue). The attribution issue has an effect on the reason content. The reason content is not necessarily significant for all. In most cases we have a specifiable and specified affected

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[9] Our ideas on conceptualizing reasons was inspired by the work of Gottweis (2006) on argumentative policy analysis and analysis of rhetoric. However, our adaptation deviates considerably from Gottweis' concept, so we refrained from adapting his terms.

[10] Not in all cases are these three steps necessarily separable, and the causal chain can be even longer with more effects which cause further effects and so on.

collectivity. So the question specifying the reason is: "What (reason content) is the effect of the attribution issue (AI) for whom (affected collectivity)?"[11]

The actor-related reasons follow a different logic. In these cases a quality of the actor leads to the evaluation. It is the quality of the actor resulting in the outcome. The actor-related reason follows a reversed causality because the characteristics of the responsible actor (AA) result in the evaluated issue (AI).

4.3 Events Embedding Actor Attributions

Actor attributions are stated by senders on some occasion. This may be a conceptual paper analyzing a situation, but in our project on the Eurozone crisis – and presumably in other future projects – the material will be newspaper reporting. If senders appear in the reporting to propose an attribution of responsibility, they often do so in the context of an event. This context is integrated in the data collection as a higher level.

An event is the occasion or reference context for an attribution in the public sphere. To collect information on this event, takes up the logic of protest event analysis. If protest is the event in which an actor attribution is embedded, the analysis on the event level is identical to a (small size) protest event analysis. As many other projects already did (see e.g. Rucht 1998; 2001; Rucht, Koopmans and Neidhardt 1998), coding of the form and issue of the protest, place, organizers, number of participants, reaction of police etc. provides valuable information on the protest activity, its organizational infrastructure and the mobilization strength.

Including also other kinds of events allows a broader view on how the debate is embedded in occurrences which keep press reporting going. Protest events do not stand alone but we can assess the importance of protest events in the flow of political events, their number and impact in respect to introducing and disseminating actor attributions. We can possibly identify action and counteraction, mutual references and dynamics of the political contention, even beyond the dynamics of protest on its own. This event level opens up a new level of analysis, which can stand alone as a source for analysis or can be combined with the actor attributions which are embedded within these events.

5. Practical Experiences and Empirical Results

"Who makes whom publically responsible for what, based on which reasons and embedded in which event context?". The guiding question of the discursive actor attribution analysis

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[11] An additional aspect of coding reasons is to specify whether the sender welcomes or criticizes the stated effect on the affected collectivity. Harming the youth in the crisis countries by higher unemployment is (probably) not desired by the attribution sender giving a reason. However, less profits for banks (which harms the affected collectivity banks) can be very well desired by an attribution sender.

(DAAA) exemplifies its complexity which implies both pitfalls for the practical coding tasks and benefits when the richness of our data is concerned. The following topics derive from the coding experience in the research project GGCRISI[12] so far and exemplify some of the pitfalls (1) and some first empirical findings (2).

(1) Coding discursive actor attributions in the Eurozone crisis debate is demanding and sometimes time-consuming. In a debate as controversial and heated as this one it is not always easy to get to the attribution's core issue or to translate figurative and metaphorical language into our standardized attribution categories. Moreover, an attribution requires a full sequence of sender, issue and addressee but especially the addressee of an attribution statement in the European multi-level system is often unclear. For example, if a Syriza spokesperson in Greece calls for an immediate end of austerity, does she address the Greek Government, the Troika representatives in the country, the governments of the Eurozone or chancellor Merkel? In many cases addressees are evident from the article context but sometimes they are not and in these cases we refrain from coding attributions. The evaluative character of the attribution, too, is not always obvious; when does a neutral description of social reality turn into a normative judgment about the diffusion of responsibility? While there are of course many clear-cut attributions, we always encounter borderline cases that need to be handled with care. The same applies for questions about separating actor attributions when considering that each change in one of the three basic elements of the attribution trias results in a new attribution. One way to deal with this latter problem is to code the more precise issue or actor that is stated in the text as shown in the following case.

> *Germany is skeptical about the European Commission's crisis management. At a council meeting on Wednesday, Merkel expressed her fierce opposition against the Commission's Eurobond proposal.*

Here, the sender as well as the attribution issue is further specified in the second sentence. That implies for the coding task: Merkel (*Attribution Sender*) negatively evaluates the future outcome (*negative prognostic causal attribution*) of the European Commission's (*Attribution Addressee*) Eurobond (*Attribution Issue*) plans in a council meeting (*Event*). This attribution illustrates a further difficulty; in some cases the distinction between prognostic and diagnostic attributions is tricky. Alternatively to the above interpretation as a prognostic attribution one could consider coding that the commission is blamed for the *past* decision to absorb the topic

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of Eurobonds at all (*diagnostic*). It is a conceptual decision to focus on the policy content rather than the policy process which led us to code the first rather than the second suggestion.

An example illustrates the logic of coding reasons:

> *Frank S. criticized the government's tax decision in parliament on Tuesday. The spokesperson of the Green party said that increases in value added tax are unjust.*

Here, the Green Party Spokesperson (*Attribution Sender*) blames (*negative causal attribution*) the German government (*Attribution Addressee*) for its value-added tax policy (*Attribution Issue*) in a parliamentary debate (*Event*). Additionally the sender provides a reason, for which we can identify a cause – effect logic: the sender justifies his negative evaluation by claiming that the criticized issue, namely the tax policy, leads to injustice (*Reasons Content*).

All these points highlight some of the complexities of coding discursive actor attributions in the Eurozone Crisis debate. In order to deal with these issues, the project's coders are extensively trained and results are constantly checked for reliability within and across the two core teams.

(2) The greatest benefit lies without doubt in the multifaceted dataset it provides. Amongst many others, the analysis of discursive actor attributions allows making inference about the actual participants in three distinct public arenas, about scapegoats and discursive alliances within and across borders, about protest events, the substantive issues at the core of the debate, about normative reference frames and reasons given and about political communication strategies in times of crisis. Here, we can only illustrate the analysis potential with some first empirical findings, based on a part of our sample.[13]

Table 1 gives an overview about attribution patterns in the crisis debate in all three public arenas under scrutiny. For matters of simplicity, we subsumed the different attribution types under the general categories "success", "blame", "request", "competence" and "others". We find an interesting difference between the Greek and the German debate. In the Greek debate, the heavy crisis impact led, for the most part, to questions of causal responsibility for policy failures. It seems that the debate mainly clusters around the question "*who is to blame for the crisis*?" while in the

Table 1: Attribution Patterns in the crisis debate

	GRE	GER	Reuters
Success	11.3%	16.7%	16.9%
Blame	54.3%	37.3%	31.3%
Request (+)	28.7%	31.0%	41.4%
Competence (+)	2.1%	7.3%	2.6%
other	3.7%	7.7%	7.8%
N	897	287	415

German debate the comparatively higher share of positive request and positive competence attributions emphasizes questions of problem solving or "*what is to be done by whom*?".

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[13] As the coding phase of the project is on its way, we can only rely on about one sixth of our sample. Therefore, all results have to be regarded as preliminary. For some other results, similarly preliminary, refer to our conference paper Sommer et al. (2014), available on the project website www.ggcrisi.org.

When now adding the attribution senders to that picture we can distinguish between several communication strategies that actors apply in order to diffuse their crisis interpretation in the public sphere. For the Greek debate for instance, table 2 distinguishes between strategies of *credit claiming* (actors attribute success to themselves), *admitting mistakes* (actors attribute failures to themselves), *credit-granting* (actors attribute success to others), *blame-shifting* (actors attribute failures to others) and *requesting others* (actors urge other actors to act in a certain way).

As a basic assumption, actors have a strategic interest to present themselves in favorable terms in the public and therefore to shift blames to others rather than to themselves (Gerhards, Offerhaus and Roose 2007; 2009). Beyond this general pattern the data show interesting differences when comparing the crisis communication of two core voices in the debate, namely the German government and the Greek government.

Table 2: Communication strategies by actor, Greece

	Credit Claiming	Credit Granting	Admitting mistakes	Blame Shifting	Request- ing others	N
Ex. GER	2.8%	22.2%	8.3%	16.7%	41.7%	36
Ex. GRE	16.7%	13.9%	4.6%	21.3%	25.0%	108

N = all attributions sent in Greece

Again, the differences are striking. While the Greek government is keen to claim successes for itself and to shift blames, these strategies are less relevant for the German government whose communication pattern is rather dominated by requesting others and even by granting credits to others. The results point to the extensive legitimation pressure for the Greek government which can be used to explain this offensive strategy of self-legitimation in the public. The more publically accountable actors experience a withdrawal of public support, the greater the incentive to actively shape a positive self-image in the public sphere (see also Sommer et al. 2014).

Table 3: Event types

Event context	%	N
Politics	26.0	426
Economy	2.4	39
Society	0.6	10
Protest	5.1	84
No Event	65.4	1072
	99.5	1631

N = all attributions sent

Table 3 and 4 provide a further perspective on the event context in which attributions are stated. In our understanding, an event is the occasion or reference context for an attribution in the public sphere. It is a situation which attracts media attention and thereby offers the opportunity to make public statements either *directly within* the event itself as in the case of protests or larger parliamentary debates, or *in direct reference* to the event as in the case of a passage of a bill which is further discussed in the public. Table 3 shows that roughly 1/3 of all attributions are embedded within event contexts and among those political events such as parliamentary meetings or European Council meetings are by far the most relevant. Protest events account for about 5% of all attributions and can be regarded a relevant context for attribution making in the public sphere. Roughly 60% of all

protest events coded so far were located in Greece which suggests an additional look at these protests.

In protest event analysis, recent attention has amongst others focused on the Europeanization of protest (della Porta/Caiani 2009, Koopmans/Statham 2010, Imig/Tarrow 2001). Next to the analysis of protest framing, protest location, protest forms and protest actors, the literature focuses on the analysis of protest targets or in our words, attribution addressees.

At least in the German crisis debate, the public indignation in the tabloid about the alleged widespread hatred of Germans at anti-austerity demonstrations in Greece[14] suggested a prominent role of the German Government as protest target and hence, a high degree of horizontally Europeanized protest. Our data suggests otherwise: By far the main target of attributions within protest events in Greece is the Greek government, followed by other actors in Greece such as the party system or the political system as such. In only one case, the German government is explicitly blamed. Even though we are aware of the limited validity at this early stage of the project, the data suggest that protest events are mainly domestically oriented and when they reach beyond the national borders, they focus on EU institutions rather than on the German Government.

Table 4: Addressees of Attributions in Protest Events (Greece)

Addressee	%	N
German Govnerment	2.0	1
Greek Government	49.0	24
Greek Parliament	2.0	1
Greek Courts	4.1	2
Greek Parties	10.2	5
Other Greek Political Actors	8.2	4
Other Greek Actors	10.2	5
EU	14.3	7
Total	100	49

N = all blames and request attributions sent in Protest Events in Greece

6. Conclusion

Public discourses are important – for politics, for culture, for societies. The broad and multi-facetted interest in discourses is well founded. Social sciences have developed a considerable

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[14] The protest banner which likened Merkel to Hitler served as the prime evidence of this new wave of "Anti-Germany-demonstrations" against "the new bogeyman of Europe" (translation by the authors). See: Deutsche Welle (2013), available at: http://www.dw.de/merkel-wie-hitler/a-16739703 (last checked: 19 September 2014).

range of approaches to analyze discourses, quantitative as well as qualitative. In regard to discourses on conflictual issues with considerable participation of protest actors especially three approaches have been used: protest event analysis, frame analysis and political claims analysis. The discursive actor attribution analysis is an instrument, which takes up and amalgamates ideas of these approaches. While protest event analysis (PEA) is focused on the forms of presenting issues in the discourse. Frame analysis (FA) analyzes the sense making in its breadth. Political claims analysis (PCA) has a middle position between the two as it includes the form of presenting claims but also looks at the content of public demands and their embeddedness in more complex interpretations. The discursive actor attribution analysis (DAAA) takes also a middle position between protest event analysis and frame analysis as the instrument combines data collection on events with data collection on the content of arguments and interpretations. However, as the structured and open measurement of interpretations has a much stronger focus, it is closer to frame analysis than to protest event analysis (see figure 3).

PEA	PCA	**DAAA**	FA

Figure 3: Approaches to analyze discourses

The discursive actor attribution analysis focuses on attribution of responsibility in the forms of blame or praise, request and competence attribution. In combination with the reasons specifically given for attributions we cover the core of the interpretative figuration. At the same time the method is open to the endless possible perspectives actors could develop and does not presuppose a limited number of frames.

The approach puts actors in the center. It relates actors who propose an attribution of responsibility with actors held responsible for an issue. Thereby it uncovers a web of blaming, praising, requesting and proposed distribution of competences. While many approaches in discourse analysis solely look at the content of the discourse itself, the discursive actor attribution approach puts actors in a central position of the analysis. Thereby it allows for interpretations in respect to strategies, social positions, resources and opportunities of actors. This perspective was somewhat lost in the pure discourse analysis where the discourse is regarded as a fait social which is analyzed on its own (see e.g. Gee and Handford 2012; Wodak and Meyer 2009).

Finally, the approach concentrates on the discursive side of responsibility attribution. An overwhelming share of responsibility is attributed routinely based on legal regulations, informally agreed rules, or is simply taken-for-granted. The discursive actor attribution analysis carves out the contentious part of attributing responsibility. It analyzes in details: Who makes whom responsible for what, based on which reasons? This analytical perspective allows to structure a very complex field of arguments and evaluations.

The discourse on the Eurozone crisis which is currently analyzed with this tool, is a particular challenge to standardized methods of discourse analysis. In the crisis situation no established interpretations, typical combinations of arguments and evaluations are available. The field is open and unclear. Therefore an analytical tool is needed to capture a previously unspecified realm of arguments and at the same time provide sufficient structure to allow for a standardized data collection. However, the crisis situation only brought a typical problem to the fore, i.e. how researchers deal with the wide variety of possible understandings, interpretations and evaluations. Pre-defining typical core interpretations has been one way which is risky in general and in talking about a crisis, this research strategy comes to its limits. The discursive actor attribution analysis is a strategy which addresses this problem.

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