Measuring the Ideational Turn in Political Science

Introducing Cognitive Mapping as a Method for the Study of Ideas

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Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed an ideational turn in political science, policy sciences, European studies, international relations and political economy (Campbell 2002; Cofas and Hay 2010; Daigneault 2013; Blyth 1997; Parsons 2002; Schmidt and Radaelli 2004; Schmidt 2008) and the fact that ‘ideas matter’ in politics has now been broadly accepted. In fact, within the past decade, the ideational research agenda has evolved from discussing whether ideas matter to the more interesting question of how, how much, and under which circumstances ideas matter. In the slipstream of this, the field has witnessed a surge of theoretical development with authors discussing the different characteristics of ideas, discourses and paradigms, the origin of ideas and how they evolve, and when and in what ways ideas influence policy making (Blyth 1997; 2013; Campbell 2002; Daigneault 2013; Goldstein and Keohane; Hall 1993; Hay 2002; Jacobsen 1995; Parsons 2002; Princen and Van Esch 2015; Schmidt 2008; Sabatier & 1993; Van Esch 2012; 2014; Wincott 2004).

Methodologically, however, the study of ideas has not kept up the pace. Scholars that venture out into the ideational empirical domain often rely on a combination of traditional methods like interviewing, process-tracing, qualitative or narrative analysis of texts and speech-acts and the occasional word count technique (Blyth 2013; Crespy and Schmidt 2014; Hall 1993; Parsons 2002; Schran-Sternberg 2012; Dietz). While studies applying these techniques have taught us many important lessons about the nature of ideas and their role in politics, these methods were never specifically designed to study ideas or the changes therein. As a consequence they struggle to capture the intricate but consequential theoretical differences between different types of ideas and ideational changes that are part and parcel of the current debate. Moreover, some of these methods are also (and sometimes simultaneously) used to the phenomenon (like policy change) that ideas are expected to influence. This

In order to help solve these methodological problems, this article will introduce an alternative method to study ideas, discourses, paradigms and the changes therein: the technique of Cognitive Mapping (CM). Cognitive mapping is a method that was specifically designed to study ideas and has been successfully applied in the fields of political and social psychology and organizational sciences (Axelrod, 1976; Bougon, Weick & Binkhorst, 1977; Curseu, Schalk & Schruijer, 2010; Princen & Van Esch 2015; Van Esch 2012; 2014; Young & Schafer, 1998). The method assists scholars in revealing and analyzing actors’ worldviews by transferring ideas imbedded into texts or speech-acts into visual graphs. The resulting cognitive maps may be analysed qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

The technique has five marked advantages for scholars involved in the ideational turn in political sciences: 1) with CM it is possible to capture and distinguish between the different types of ideas identified in the literature; 2) the technique helps to systematically distinguish between different forms of ideational change; 3) using CM helps scholars to disentangle ideas from non-ideational factors in their analyses; 4) the method’s inductive and structural character allows it to be used to study the ideas of a broad range of actors on any issue of interest; 5) the technique plays no epistemological favourites: It can, and has been, used to provide both detailed idiosyncratic narratives of actors’ ideas and in-depth understanding their worldviews as well as quantitative representations of actors’ ideas that may be used in large-scale comparative or longitudinal studies and statistical analyses.

This article will first provide an overview of the methodological issues that political scientists engaged in the ideational turn face. Subsequently, the paper will introduce the technique of Cognitive Mapping and discuss how this method may be of value to scholars looking to ascertain the nature, origin, evolution and role of ideas, discourses or paradigms.
The third section will illustrate the value-added of the technique using the case of the Euro crisis and worldviews of the German Chancellor Merkel and French President Sarkozy. The article will conclude by discussing the pros and cons of cognitive mapping and delineate the boundaries of what this technique can and cannot offer scholars engaged in the ideational turn in the political sciences.

Methodological Challenges in the Study of Ideas

In recent decades, political scientists have come to acknowledgement that under circumstance ideas, paradigms and discourse may be important drivers of politics and policy-making. While ideology has long been accepted as a formidable force in electoral and party politics, scholars now became interested in how and under what circumstances, ideas, discourse and paradigms play a role in politics, policy making, and international relations. In their discussions, scholars have put forward theses regarding the stability or flexibility of ideas (refs), the role of ideas as causes, switchmen, road maps, strategic weapons or even the gestalt that unconsciously shapes actors’ very understanding of the world (Hall 1993; Parsons 2002; Schmidt 2008). Methodologically, however, the discipline has not kept up the pace. Scholars studying ideas generally rely on a toolbox filled with methods and techniques designed to study non-ideational factors in politics and policy making. Studies relying on these methods have made great contributions to the literature, however they do have trouble capturing specific characteristics of ideas, paradigms and discourse that scholars have come to see as consequential in recent years. This may be one of the reasons for two key contributors to the ideational turn in politics to conclude that the empirical analysis of ideas and discourses is ‘no easy task’ (Schmidt and Radaelli 2002: 205). More particularly, students of ideas face the following four methodological challenges:
How to Measure up?

Surely, measuring ideational factors is no easy task, for ideas are intangible phenomenon that flow from actors’ minds and cannot be observed directly (Fiske and Taylor 1991; Risse 1994). However, if we regard them as a significant force in politics and policy making, we need to ‘threat ideas as measurable concepts’ (Baumgartner 2013) in order to further our understanding of the role of ideas as well as to establish the value of our theoretical ideas. One way to deal with this methodological challenge is to study the observable consequences of ideas (King, Keohane and Verba 1994: 41). This can be done in two ways. Firstly, scholars can rely on actors own professions of the beliefs they hold. Secondly, we can study non-verbal behavioural patterns that may be tied to holding certain beliefs.

Both methods have their own advantages and drawbacks and the choice for one or the other should be dependent on the question at hand. In the case of highly controversial or morally contested issues, scholars may prefer to study non-verbal behaviours. However, when one is trying to explain behaviour by reference to ideas relying on behaviour may render one’s study tautological (Daigneault 2013). Under these circumstances relying on actors’ assertions may be the better choice. In addition, analysing speech-acts (or writings) may enable scholars to conduct a more intricate analysis of actors’ ideas, and provide insight in the more comprehensive argumentation and narrative underlying their views. Concerns about whether actors’ speech-acts provide a ‘genuine’ reflection of their ideas, may be dealt with by use of triangulation with accounts of third parties (Van Esch 2012), careful selection and consideration of the context and motivations for discursive double-games (Crespy and Schmidt 2014), and the stability of beliefs under different circumstances (Van Esch 2014).  

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1 These concerns rise especially when studies rely on public speech-acts, which – given the scarcity of private sources – is often the case. Studies in foreign policy analysis indicate, however, that public speech-acts may provide reliable insight in actors’ ideas (Renshon 2008, Marfleet 2000, Dyson 2014).
Ideas in all forms and sizes

The second methodological challenge facing the ideational turn in political science is to distinguish between the many different forms of ideas that are deemed relevant in the literature. Generally, a broad distinction is made between worldviews (or belief systems), paradigms and discourses. Worldviews are generally defined as actors' subjective thoughts on how the world works (Levy, 1994). These ideas are not necessarily accurate or rational in the sense of being obtained through a thorough cost-benefits analysis or process of trial and error. Rather, peoples’ belief systems emerge and gain strength throughout life and are informed by their experience, education and roles. However, while they are not rational, ideas or belief systems are assumed to show some consistency through time.

Policy paradigms constitute a particular kind of belief system that is worth mentioning separately in this regard. Following Hall (1993: 279), a paradigm is defined as a ‘framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing’. This definition overlaps almost completely with the definition of belief system provided above. However, in contrast to regular belief systems, paradigms are ‘ideas on steroids’ (Baumgartner, 2014): Highly dense and consistent configurations of views, that are incommensurable with rival paradigms (Hall 1993; Princen and ‘t Hart 2014). Moreover, paradigms are seen as an influential determinant of actors’ behavioural patterns and are at the root of grand ideological clashes over policy-making. In the literature, paradigms are placed at the top of the belief hierarchy and seen to be extremely resistant to change. Only major crises and the availability of an alternative paradigm may on rare occasions induce a paradigm shift (Hall 1993).

Finally, discourses are systems of thought composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of actions, beliefs and practices that construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak (Foucault, 1972). While belief systems are in essence individual cognitions, for this project
discourses are defined as the way ideas and paradigms are being shaped and expressed and are therefore social entities. Public discourses are composed of several frames that focus on and highlight a selection of reality. Entmann (1993) distinguishes four functions of such discursive frames that tie in seamlessly with the definition of sense making: The first function is to define what the problem is. A problem definition automatically bestows certain attributes on a situation like who is to blame for a situation and who the victim. The second and related function of a frame is to identify the causes of the problem. The third function is to pass judgment on a situation, its causes and effects and the actors involved. The last function of a frame is to suggest remedies for the problem.

Belief systems, paradigms and discourses are assumed to include a number of different kinds of ideas at different levels of abstraction. Despite their different disciplinary roots and terminology, most studies distinguish three forms of ideas (Daigneault 2013; George 1969; Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Hall 1993; Jervis 2006; Levy 1994; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Schmidt 2008; Tetlock, 1991): 1) diagnostic beliefs that involve thoughts on the state of the world and nature of the circumstances at hand; 2) instrumental beliefs concerning the means or policies that may provide the intermediary connection to certain results or goals; and 3) principled beliefs that denote the moral values or utilitarian ends actors strive for. Moreover, these different ideas are presumed to be connected by causal and normative relations to form a worldview, discourse or paradigm (Schmidt 2010; Carstensen 2011; Princen and Van Esch 2015; Van Esch 2014).

The distinctions between these different ideas and ideational frames are important, not just descriptively, but also because they are expected to evolve and affect political behaviour and policy making in different ways. Many theories on foreign policymaking as well as the Advocacy Coalitions Framework, for instance, expect principled beliefs to be more stable than other ideas, and the political consensus based on them to be more sustainable (refs).
Moreover, while some authors contest the need to distinguish paradigms from other ideas (Baumgartner 2014), the characteristics attributed to them - their power, consistency and incommensurability - are all seen as consequential: Weak ideas have little influence and are unlikely to disseminate (refs). Consistency has been seen as a determinant of strength but may also liken ideational frameworks to a billiard ball: resistant to change but more likely to break when the pressure get to high (refs). Incommensurability has been associated with grand ideological clashes, polarization and radical U-turns (Hall 1993), commensurability with bricolage, openness to consensus and incremental change (Carstensen 2011). In other words, very different expectations concerning the role and effects are associated with the different forms of ideas in the literature. To enhance our understanding of where, how and when ideas matter, the ideational turn in politics needs a new toolset that enables scholars to make the empirical distinction between these different kinds of ideas, their power, consistency and incommensurability.

Ideational change

The relevance of such a new toolset may be even more pronounced for the debate on ideational change. As indicated above, ideational change may be a potential driver of political and policy change. However, in the literature, no consensus exists on the degree to which worldviews, discourses and paradigms are flexible (add refs Ondrej). As ultimately, it is an empirical question to what extent ideas are stable or not, we are in ‘dire need’ of more empirical studies of exactly how ideas change (Carstensen 2011: ?) as well as the tools to conduct such analyses.

Some of the disagreement on whether ideas are generally stable or flexible stems from conceptual confusion (Baumgartner 2014). In political psychological studies, three strands of ideational change are distinguished: 1) Lateral expansion or reduction: The in- or exclusion
of certain diagnostic, instrumental or principled ideas; 2) A change in concept saliency: The increase or decrease in the saliency of certain diagnostic, instrumental or principled ideas; 3) A change in the ideational rationale: A change in the underlying logic of a belief system, paradigm or discourse as exhibited by changes in pivotal causal or normative relations (Van Esch 2014; Levy 2004; Steinbruner 1974). The first two forms of change take place at the level of the concepts used, the latter concerns a change in the relationships between these concepts.

Apart from indicating different forms ideas may change, these may be expected to be more or less consequential. Lateral expansion or reduction is likely to be the least significant. After the outbreak of the financial and Euro crises, actors promoting austerity in the past may have started to include positive references to the new European rules enforcing these. Such a change indicates an openness to external events but is likely to be rather inconsequential in the greater scheme of things. A change in concept saliency may be more consequential: When the same advocates of austerity start proclaiming the drawbacks of governmental investment more often and more forcefully this may significantly affect policy making. However, this still does not touch upon the defining core of their belief system. Rather, it is in the underlying rationale of a belief system, discourse or paradigm – in the nature of its causal and normative relations - that its essence lies. For, if that same pro-austerity actor would come to believe that – in fact – governmental investment fosters economic growth, it would surely touch upon the defining core of an ideational system and be very consequential.

While this classification clarifies the different forms of ideational change that actors may experience, several other characteristics of ideational change are still obscured. Further distinction should be made firstly in the different directions in which ideas may change. For lateral expansion, increase in saliency or strengthening of underlying rationale may involve weakening or total re-evaluation of pre-existing ideas as well as the reinforcement of pre-
existing beliefs (Renshon 2008; Author, 2007; Author, 2014). Needless to say that these are likely to have a very different effects on politics and policy making. Moreover, much of the discussion on ideational change (in particular paradigmatic change) involves a clash in views on the *process* of ideational change. Depending on their views on the consistency and commensurability of certain worldviews or paradigms, authors posit that actors’ ideas change incrementally or via radical ideational U-turns. Finally, conceptualising idea change as a spectrum rather than an either/or variable would more justice to empirical reality. The methodological tools currently in use have difficulty making these intricate distinctions between different forms, directions, processes and levels of ideational change empirically.

*Bridging ontological and epistemological tensions*

The final problem the ideational turn faces is that scholars from all ontological and epistemological corners of the discipline have developed an interest in the role, development and effects of ideational factors. Some of them favour qualitative techniques, others quantitative research, some adhere to methodological individualism, others identify as constructivists. It is a hefty challenge to bridge these dualisms and bring the inherent tensions between these different ontological and epistemological stances to productivity (Blyth 1997; Bonham and Shapiro 1986; Carstensen 2011; Cofas and Hay 2010). Whereas a methodological technique cannot help in bridging these differences, it would help to develop a single method that can be used to conduct both intricate narrative as well as a systematic quantitative analyses of ideas and discourses andin itself does not play any ontological and epistemological favourites.
Cognitive mapping

It would be a hefty brief to fill for one method to be able to meet all these challenges. However, cognitive mapping addresses many of these issues and has particular strengths that may complement the methods currently in use in ideational studies. More specifically, the technique has three marked advantages: 1) It presents ideas in a very specific form which makes it is more easy to distinguish between ideational factors and the behaviour, politics and policies that cause or influence ideas; 2) It enables scholars to make a distinction between the different types of ideas and ideational systems that are deemed significant in the literature; 3) It enables scholars to distinguish between the different forms, directions and level of ideational change; 4) It plays no ontological or epistemological favourites, can and has been used by scholars with different epistemological and ontological positions. Moreover, the technique harbours distinct qualitative and quantitative modes of analysis that can be used separately and together. Finally, cognitive mapping can and has been used inductively and deductively and is therefore suited to study a wide variety of topics and issues.

Cognitive Mapping is a method specifically designed to analyse ideas and has been successfully applied in political science, social psychology and organizational studies (Axelrod, 1976; Bougon, Weick & Binkhorst, 1977; Curseu, Schalk & Schruijer, 2010; Princen and Van Esch 2015; Van Esch 2012; 2014; Young & Schafer, 1998). Its inductive character allows for a discrete focus on specific issues and can therefore be used to study a broad range of actors and issues.

Originally, the cognitive map was used to study how leaders arrive at their decisions and was aimed at devising a method to improve their decision-making skills (Axelrod, 1976a: 3; Young and Schafer, 1998: 75). However, the body of literature on cognitive mapping has evolved significantly over the years. The technique has – amongst others - been used by to answer questions concerning 1) the substance of actors’ or organizational ideas and paradigms
and the change therein (Bonham, Shapiro & Trumble 1979; Hart 1976; Kim & Rai 2001; Princen and Van Esch 2015; Van Esch 2007; 2012; 2014; Young 1994); 2) the structural characteristics of belief systems and worldviews (Hart 1976; Levi & Tetlock 1980; Ross 1976; Young 1994); and 3) the forecasting and explanation of political behaviours like the position of actors in, and outcome of negotiations and coalition-formation (Bonham & Shapiro 1973; Bonham, Shapiro & Trumble 1979; Hart 1976; 1977; Young 1994; Stokman 2012).

The CM technique rest upon the premise that thought processes are reflected in actors’ spoken or written communication rather than their behaviour (Axelrod 1976; Young and Schafer 1998). In contrast to content analysis, which is essentially ‘a counting procedure’, the basis of a cognitive map is the relationship between concepts, rather than the concepts themselves (Axelrod, 1976a: 7; cf. Carstensen 2011; Crespy and Schmidt). As such, an analyst typically looks for the subject-verb-object constructions in texts or speech-acts (Young, 1996: 397). More specifically, to create a cognitive map all the causal and utility relationships and the concepts they link are manually derived from a text. Utility statements are statements to the effect that something is ‘good’, ‘in someone’s interest’, ‘in the general benefit’. Extensive coding-manuals exists for deriving these relations from texts, and scholars need relatively little training to achieve good rates of inter-coder reliability (Axelrod, 1976; Hart, 1977; Young and Schafer, 1998).

In principle, the concepts included in a CM must all be unique concept, synonyms describing the same phenomenon should be grouped under a single concept prior to constructing a CM. Moreover, comparative or longitudinal analyses over time or between different actors additional standardization of concepts may be needed by placing idiosyncratic

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2 This article focusses on the ‘indirect’ elicitation of cognitive maps: This means that the cognitive maps are constructed by a scholar on the basis of texts or speech-acts (like speeches, interviews, debates and writings). Cognitive maps can also be obtained directly by asking actors to ‘draw’ their cognitive maps themselves (Van Esch, Steenman, Bakker, Snellens, 2014).
events and concepts should be placed under the label of a general phenomenon (Heradstveit and Narvesen, 1978: 81). No rules exist for the proper level of standardization other than that it should do justice to the meaning actors assign to their ideas and it suits the ontological and theoretical focus of the study at hand (Laukanen and Wang 2015; Young 1992).  

After the standardisation of concepts, the cognitive map is constructed by transforming the causal and utility-relations into a visual graph in which the concepts are depicted as points and the relations between these concepts as arrows (Axelrod 1976; Van Esch 2007; Young 1996; Young and Schafer 1998; see figure 1). To facilitate this process, cognitive mapping applications Maps, Worldview and Gephi may be used (Young, 1996; Bastian, Heymann, Jacomy, 2009). In general, the cause-concepts are located at the left-hand side of the map, while the effect-concepts are located at the right-hand side. The relationships (arrows) in the map are attributed a sign to indicate whether a concept is perceived to contribute positively

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3 The coding of texts or speech-acts and standardisation of concepts may be facilitated by the use of CM software MAPS. This software also automatically generates data import files suitable for other CM software programmes like Worldview and Gephi.
(+ or negatively (-) to another, or whether the actor has (explicitly) indicated that a concept had no bearing on another (0).

Analysis

The analysis of cognitive maps has three roots: the paths in the map, the saliency of concepts and relations; and the structural position of concepts within the map. Together they enable a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the ideas represented in the map.

The first basis for analysis of the ideas in a cognitive map is by analysing the paths in a map. A path is a sequence of any number of concepts and relations in a cognitive map. Any path leading out of a concept is called a consequent path, any path feeding into a concept is an antecedent path to that concept. By analysing the signs of the relationships that link the concepts in a path, it may be established whether and how any concept A is perceived to be causally related to every other concept B. In addition, analysis of the paths reveals whether a certain idea is valued positively, negatively or ambiguously. To do this all consequent paths leading from a concept to a ‘utility concept’ are studied. As utility concepts refer to a group or leaders' general and abstract sense of well-being or the lack thereof, they hold a natural positive or negative value. By analysing the sign of the consequent path between a concept and a utility concept, it may be established whether an idea is valued positively, negatively or ambiguously within a belief system, paradigm or discourse (Hart 1977; Van Esch 2007; 2014).

The second basis for the analysis of the ideas represented in a cognitive map is the saliency (S) of the concepts and relations in the map. In cognitive mapping, the relative strength of policy beliefs (concepts or relations) is determined by establishing the frequency with which they are mentioned. The more salient the concept or relation, the larger they

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4 A concept A that is linked through a path with all positive relations or an even amount of negative relations to concept B, is perceived to be positively contributing to, or following from concept B. A concept A that is linked to B through a path containing a uneven amount of negative relations is seen to be negatively associated with B. A concept A that is linked to concept B by any number of non-existing (0) relations, is not associated with B.
appear in the map (see figure 1). If the saliency of a relation is more than 1, this is noted in the arrow in the (excerpts of the) cognitive map. The saliency of a concept is calculated by adding up all of the relations by which the concept is connected to others. The saliency of the relation is thereby included in the calculation. The saliency of the concept 'benefit of all' in figure 1 is 4 (two relations with S=1 and one relation with S=2), the saliency of concept sound public finances is 2 (2 relations with S=1).

Finally, the overall position of a concept in the map can be used to analyse the meaning of the ideas in a map. This may be done qualitatively, however, building on the work of Hart (1977) and Bougon et al (1977) Van Esch (2014) has developed the measure of goal-orientation (GO). This measure is based on the premise that the more relations feed into a concept, the more it may be regarded as a goal, while the more relations feed out of a concept, the more it may be regarded as a trigger or instrument. For instance, in figure 1, the concept ‘monetary stability’ has only incoming relations (it has an ‘in-degree’ of 4), no outgoing relations (it has an out-degree of 0) and is therefore considered a typical goal with a GO of 1. Conversely, ‘SGP’ (Stability and Growth Pact) has only out-going relations and is therefore a typical cause-concept with a GO of -1.

The Changing Worldviews of Merkozy during the Euro crisis

To illustrate the potential of cognitive mapping for studying ideas, discourses and paradigms, the worldviews of German chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy are studied as well as the changes therein during the first two years of the Euro-crisis. In this study, CCM is used as an ‘at a distance’-technique: The maps constructed in this study are composed on the basis of actors' public assertions concerning European economic and

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5 The in-degree are the number of relations that feed into a concept (of which the concept is the effect), the out-degree are the number of relations that emerge out of a concept (of which the concept is the cause). The formula for calculating GO = (Indegree – Outdegree) / Centrality with a range from -1 to 1 (cf. Bougon et al, 1977; Hart, 1977). Centrality is the sum of the In- and Outdegree. In contrast to Saliency, the measures of Centrality, In- and Outdegree do not take into account the Saliency of the relation.
monetary issues. This enables the longitudinal study of actors ideas concerning recent events like the Euro crisis that may otherwise impossible (Hart, 1977; Marfleet, 2000; Renshon, 2009; Walker & Schafer, 2000; Young & Schafer, 1998: 67). The complete maps of Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy consist of between 85 and 168 relations.

The analysis conducted makes use of both the qualitative and quantitative potential of the cognitive mapping technique.\(^6\) To capture the paradigmatic orthodoxy of actors’ cognitions, in a quantitative analysis all standardised concepts in the maps were classified as either Keynesian, Ordoliberal or neutral. The intercoder reliability in terms of Cohen’s Kappa was substantial with a rate of 0.73 (Gwet, 2012: 122-128). To establish leaders’ positions on the Keynesian-Ordoliberal dimension, the aggregate saliency and centrality measures of all concepts in a CM denoting either a Keynesian or Ordoliberal preference are calculated. To facilitate comparison over time or leader, this score is divided by the aggregated saliency and centrality of the entire map.

*The Ordoliberal Views of Chancellor Merkel*

Arguably the most influential member of the European Council is the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The study reveals that prior to the crisis her belief system had a strong Ordoliberal outlook on economic and monetary policy-making (see Table 1). Ordoliberal concepts like ECB independence (S=14), price stability and the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP, all S=7) were most central to her map and are all regarded in a positive light. The overall saliency of Ordoliberal concepts (19% of the map total) was eight times as high as that of Keynesian concepts (2.3%). Moreover, on average the Ordoliberal beliefs were almost twice as salient as Keynesian beliefs.

\(^6\) An earlier version of this analysis is published in Van Esch 2014 and is not yet adapted to fit the central argument of this paper.
Table 1: The Keynesian and Ordoliberal Nature of the Worldview of Merkel and Sarkozy (in S; SD calculated over larger set of leaders)

This image is mirrored at a more fundamental narrative level. For while the Chancellor did not engage in any in-depth, detailed economic analysis, her cognitive map reveals two strands of textbook Ordoliberal logic. To begin with, ECB independence was seen as a necessary condition for sound single monetary policy-making, the credibility of EMU and the stability of the Euro-zone. Moreover, the Chancellor rejected changing the ECB’s mandate to include other goals than price-stability. Although she did not award price-stability the position as ultimate goal \((GO = -0.7)\), it was a salient concept and she associated it with a range of positive economic consequences. Finally, Merkel voiced the typical Ordoliberal belief that price-stability and economic growth are not mutually exclusive. In fact, price-stability was seen to foster economic growth.

With regard to the fiscal dimension of Ordoliberal thought, Merkel applauded the SGP for stimulating sound national economic and financial policies and public finances. As with the European convergence criteria and the German constitutional debt-brake, these variables
were all believed to foster monetary stability (see figure 1). The only remarkable exception to the Ordoliberal character of her belief system is that the consequences Merkel attributed to EMU were largely Keynesian in nature. Specifically the omission of price-stability as a goal of the single currency is remarkable.

After the onset of the crisis, Merkel remains Ordoliberal in her thinking, but some changes occur, both in terms of the concepts she distinguishes as in the underlying rationale. Firstly, the Ordoliberal character of her views reduces. This is due both to the lateral expansion of her belief system with Keynesian beliefs, as well as an increase in the average saliency of these new beliefs which now exceed that of Ordoliberal concepts. Closer inspection reveals that these new Keynesian ideas predominantly consist of favourable references to the crisis-measures of 2010 and 2011. On the whole, however, the aggregate saliency of Ordoliberal beliefs remains twice that of Keynesian beliefs.

At a more fundamental level, the monetary strain of reasoning in Merkel's Ordoliberal thinking all but disappears after the onset of the Euro-crisis (see figure 3). The main concepts within this logic - ECB independence (S=1) and price stability (S=3) become significantly less salient and the only strain of logic reminiscent of the monetary arguments in the pre-crisis map is Merkel’s frequent references to the importance of trust and credibility. However, she does not link these concepts explicitly to ECB independence, its mandate to guard price-stability or its market-interventions as would have be expected from a true Ordoliberal. In line with the dominant ‘budgetary’ definition of the Euro-crisis in the European public debate, after the onset of the crisis, fiscal Ordoliberal arguments become dominant in
Merkel’s mind (see figure 3). The economic stimulation and saviour of the banking sector in the preceding years (both S=2) are pointed out as the main causes of the Euro-crisis, austerity and sound public finances (S=18) as its proper solution.

The crisis also introduces some clear Keynesian argumentation in the Chancellor’s belief system. Firstly, while Merkel feels economic stimulation and bailing out the banking sector contributed to the emergence of the Euro-crisis, she endorses the fiscal support packages (S=12), ECB-interventions and the Euro-plus-pact as means to save EMU and restore market trust (both S=10). This indicates that she considers the benefits of these forms of economic stimulation to outweigh their negative effects, a typically Keynesian line of reasoning. However, on the whole these Keynesian arguments are less numerous and central to her beliefs than her Ordoliberal convictions.

Overall, with the outbreak of the crisis, the Chancellor’s worldview becomes less univocally Ordoliberal and more and more salient Keynesian ideas are included. Moreover, within the paradigm boundaries of Ordoliberalism, the shift from a predominantly monetary to fiscal outlook is reminiscent of the dominant European discourse at the time. In essence, however, Merkel’s belief system remains predominantly Ordoliberal at all levels. The Euro-crisis merely causes a reduction of the Ordoliberal nature of her views on Europe and the crisis (see table 1).

President Sarkozy: The Ambiguity and Stability in Views

In contrast to the German Chancellor, the pre-crisis cognitive map of President Sarkozy was pre-dominantly Keynesian in character. This is especially apparent at the conceptual level, for both the aggregated and average concept saliency of his Keynesian beliefs were 2.8 times as high as that of his Ordoliberal beliefs (see table 1). However, the President’s narrative is
clearly in defiance of the Ordoliberalist logic, but at the same time his two dominant lines of thinking only touched lightly upon the core of the Keynesian paradigm.

Sarkozy’s first dominant line of thinking revolved around the conviction that political debate on monetary policy is desirable ($S=18$, $G_0=-0.27$). In the eyes of the President, such political interference in monetary policy fosters economic growth, promotes the national interest and provides a proper solution to the financial crisis (see figure 5). More remarkably, Sarkozy did not perceive this to be at odds with the independence of the ECB ($S=8$), which he also valued positively. In fact, in his eyes, ECB independence fosters the political debate on monetary policy (see figure 4). The second line of thinking is related to the first. For the President also argued that the political-economic use of one’s currency ($S=19$, $G_0=-0.73$) promoted economic growth ($S=7$) and employment ($S=6$). This view was reinforced by the conviction that the single currency demanded the establishment of what Sarkozy calls an European economic government ($S=12$): a meeting of the European Heads–of State and Government to make decisions on European economic and monetary policy. The establishment thereof would stimulate the political-economic use of the Euro. Both lines of thinking are in clear contradiction to the Ordoliberal belief that monetary policy-making should be established by the independent, a-political experts of the ECB. Moreover, although monetary financing was not explicitly mentioned by the President, political use of monetary and exchange-rate policy certainly does not preclude this.

While Sarkozy’s pre-crisis beliefs were thus in direct contradiction to Ordoliberalism, they were only mildly Keynesian. Placing European monetary policy-making in the hands of politicians and the political use of the Euro to foster economic growth and employment is associated with Keynesianism. However, the President’s dominant reason to advocate this was to nullify the competitive advantage of low exchange rates of other world powers, and counter the ‘monetary dumping’ by the US. These arguments are more mercantilist than
Keynesian. In addition, Sarkozy did not explicitly advocate government expenditure and investment and noted that such measures increased budgetary deficits which he valued ambiguously. On the other hand, the President did support a flexibilisation of the SGP. This leads to the conclusion that overall, Sarkozy’s pre-crisis fundamental beliefs clearly were not Ordoliberal, and low in Keynesian orthodoxy.

Figure 3: Excerpt from a pre-crisis cognitive map of President Nicolas Sarkozy

At the conceptual level, Sarkozy experienced a significant belief change with the onset of the Euro-crisis. This was predominantly due to a significant decrease of the number of Keynesian beliefs and their saliency (see table 1). As a result, Ordoliberal beliefs become dominant. Since the average saliency of Keynesian and Ordoliberal is now similar, it must be concluded that after the outbreak of the Euro-crisis, Sarkozy experienced a reversal of conceptual beliefs from Keynesian to Ordoliberal.

At a more fundamental level, the crisis-induced changes in the worldview of the French President are more ambiguous. Firstly, after the onset of the Euro-crisis, Sarkozy
develops more fiscal beliefs and explicitly voices the opinion that poor public finances are problematic and lie at the root of the Euro-crisis (see figure 6). In his eyes, sound public finances (S=7) and the (strengthening of) SGP (S=6) are beneficial and a condition for the success and credibility of EMU. Government expenditure (S=1), public debt and deficit (S=5, S=2) are identified as a danger to national independence and the French interests. At the same time, however, the President advocates the establishment of a European monetary fund (S=3) and supports the more Keynesian crisis-measures like the fiscal support (S=6) and the Euro-plus-pact (S=3).

In monetary terms, Sarkozy’s crisis beliefs remains in conflict with Ordoliberal thinking. Although the two dominant arguments pleading for political use of monetary and exchange rate policy disappears as such, Sarkozy still deems high exchange rates (S=6), speculation (S=6) and monetary dumping by the US (S=1) as most problematic and a the
establishment of a ‘European economic government’ (S=8) conditional for the success of EMU. The President makes no mention of price-stability or ECB independence. Overall, while his secondary beliefs thus clearly undergo a significant change, Sarkozy’s narrative remains mildly Keynesian rather than Ordoliberal. The onset of the Euro-crisis thus induces a clear paradigmatic reversal in the President’s use of concepts from predominantly Keynesian to Ordoliberal. However, the slight reversal of fundamental beliefs clearly concerns only the fiscal dimension of Ordoliberalism. All in all, the President thus experiences a full paradigmatic belief reversal at the level of the concepts in his view on Europe and the crisis but remains mildly Keynesian in his overall narrative.

Conclusion

This study aimed to introduce Comparative Cognitive Mapping as a technique particularly suited for the analysis of ideas in political and policy sciences. Using the ideas of Angela Merkel and Sarkozy as an example, it has shown this technique to enable the systematic longitudinal and comparative analysis of actors’ ideas in both a quantitative and qualitative fashion. As the method is inductive in nature, scholars can use CCM to study the ideas of a wide variety of actors and organisation in any issue-area. Moreover, the development of several useful software applications renders the technique more efficient than it used to be. It is clear that the methodology introduced in this article hold great potential to increase our understanding of how ideas emerge and evolve and the role they play in politics.

In addition, the technique result in a much more precise reflection of ideas then word-count techniques since it takes into account the way in which ideas-as-concepts are related in both causal and normative fashion. In addition, by presenting a holistic map of an entire ideation system rather than as a summation of isolated concepts, CM reveals the narrative underlying worldviews, paradigms and discourses.
However, like all methods, CM has its strengths and weaknesses. In the field of discourse analysis, for instance, the advantages of CM go hand in hand with two drawbacks. Firstly, discourse consists of both ideas and interaction. CM may help to separate these two key components. However, while CM can reveal, visualize and enable the (longitudinal) comparison of ideas embedded in discourses, it cannot help scholars study the interactional component of discourse. However, combined with existing techniques like process-tracing or network analysis (ref Leifeld), it may provide a powerful tool. In addition, CM was developed precisely to reveal the hidden (and faulty) cognitions that actors are themselves often unaware of (Axelrod, 1976). To do this, CCM rids the sources from rhetorical element by reducing them to graphs, stripping them back to their bare logical structure. It is therefore not suited to study the rhetoric that may be a vital part of an actor’s worldview or public discourse.

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