Genesis and Evolution of the Representations of the Euro

Christine Roland-Lévy
GRASP, Institut de Psychologie, Université René Descartes - Paris 5

Author’s address: Tel.: 33 (0)1 4286 3326; Fax: 33 (0)1 4286 3327; e-mail: Christine.Roland-Levy@psycho.univ-paris5.fr

Abstract
The paper studies the construction of attitudes and social representations of the euro, via different populations and different tools and techniques; the evolution is observed before the introduction of the euro and after. This is studied during three distinct phases: (i) one year before the concrete introduction of the euro, (ii) during the first months after the euro has been introduced to everyone, but while the use of the former currency was still possible, (iii) and one year later. Different samples of subjects, including adults and teenagers, were approached during these three phases. Subjects’ attitudes and representations, of matters related to money in general and more specifically to the euro, were considered in the three phases. In the paper a theoretical debate concerning the genesis of a new social representation is first presented, followed by a discussion focussed on various methodological aspects linked to the study of attitudes and representations, before analysing the results in terms of the evolution of the perception of the euro related with the increasing practical use of the currency.

Keywords: Social representation, attitude, euro.

Introduction
Through the example of the switch to the euro, which has affected the social, economic and political spheres of the euro-countries, this paper aims at showing how the social representation of a new object can be constructed, how attitudes actually evolve, and how both social representation and attitudes may affect one’s feeling of belonging. Based on two series of studies (Study 1: adults; Study 2: adolescents) this paper analyses the potential effect of the introduction of the euro-currency on subjects’ perception of Europe. It is assumed that the feeling of belonging to Europe, along with the impression of being European, will change with the simultaneous issuance of the common European currency in the twelve countries of the euro-zone. It is hypothesised that this perception varies according to several variables, related both to the subjects themselves and to their degree of familiarity with the euro. This paper compares attitudes towards the euro and its social representations in 2001, one year before the actual introduction of the euro, and from January 15th to February 15th 2002 when the euro first became the single currency of the European Monetary Union. Different samples were studied: adults and teenagers (11- to 18-year-olds) were interviewed during these three distinct periods.

Social Representation and Attitudes
Social representation expresses the values, norms and attitudes of social groups. The concept is well suited to the analysis of how a new object, the euro, was perceived while it was still virtual, and once it became a reality. As the representation of a social object is the description of how it is perceived, there should be a strong relationship between the social representation of this object and the subject’s attitude towards it. This study aims at showing how a new representation is gradually built, from individual attitudes, and is shared by many, thus progressively becoming a common social representation. Attitudes tend to influence how one will act towards a specific object, such as the euro, or towards a new situation, such as the switch from a national currency to a new currency. Attitudes are known to be composed of three main structural characteristics: (i) a cognitive one linked to the perception and representation of that object or situation; (ii) an affective dimension related to the emotional aspect(s) in terms of attraction or repulsion towards the object or situation; (iii) an operational characteristic described as a predisposition towards action. The comparison of samples of teenagers and adults should provide interesting information, based on a description of attitudes and their evolution, and on how a new social representation is being constructed. In studying the general attitude towards the euro in our population, our goal is, on the one hand, to examine the relations between attitudes and social representations, and, on the other, to investigate potential links between them and national versus European identity.

Initially conceived by Durkheim (1898) at the end of the nineteenth century, the concept of social representation was revived by Moscovici (1961, 1976, 1989) in his study of psychoanalysis in French society. Social representations are social forms of knowledge, free from scientific constraints and formalized in figurative schemata. They can serve as a basis for perceiving and interpreting reality, as well as for channelling people's behaviour. Furthermore, they are related to the social characteristics of people. Empirical evidence shows that, most of the time, it is possible to distinguish different social representations corresponding to particular groups, and/or at specific epochs, when specific changes occur. The initial formulation of Moscovici
focuses on the genesis of social representations through two major processes: objectification and anchoring. Objectification translates some of the characteristics of an unfamiliar object, such as a new currency, into the terms of our reality. In this process, the individual selects some specific information of that unfamiliar object (this stage is called “selection of information”); with this selected information, the subject reorganises his/her knowledge (“de-contextualising”); and is then ready to reconstruct this unfamiliar object into something more familiar (this stage involves a “reconstruction” into a new schema built with certain specific dimensions). Anchoring includes two different aspects: a cognitive aspect according to which the object is integrated into the previous thoughts of individuals; the second aspect is a social one, having to do with a social group giving meaning to a representation. Thus, interpretations of a particular object can differ from one group to another.

Since Moscovici’s early work (1961), different theoretical approaches have been developed. One of them considers the cognitive organisation of social representations in terms of different kinds of elements: central versus peripheral ones. According to Abric’s structural approach (1976, 1984), social representations are composed of a central nucleus surrounded by peripheral elements. This theoretical approach, based on a hierarchical structure of representation, was completed by Flament (1981), and as such, deals with the idea of a specific internal structure of the representation. More recently, researchers have been interested in the problem of change in social representations. Guimelli (1989), through a survey about the social representations of hunting, showed that depending on the different social practices of hunters (ecological or traditional practices), it was possible to observe significant differences in the social representations of the two groups. Flament (1994) and Abric (1994) also argued that social practices were a major factor in the determination of representations in a change process.

In order to study social representations, various tools can be applied. In this paper, two techniques are used to distinguish the central elements of the genesis of the social representation of a new currency from the more peripheral elements; the first is based on free association tasks, providing the hypothetical central nucleus, while the second involves a selection of blocks of items forming the core of the representation.

This paper combines various theoretical ideas: an exploration of attitudes to and representations of the euro.

Method

As already stated, this paper aims at analysing attitudes and social representations of a new currency, one year before the actual introduction of the euro, and in January and February 2002 when the euro became the common currency in France and in the other 11 countries of the euro-zone. It was hypothesised that, with the practical use of the new single currency, differences in terms of social representations and attitudes, before and after the arrival of the euro, would be found. A questionnaire was designed to investigate attitudes towards the national currency (French francs) and the euro, and social representations. In the first part of the questionnaire, subjects’ representations relating mainly to the euro were considered. A series of attitude scales were introduced to measure the attitudes towards the euro and Europe. In both studies, during phase 2 and 3, subjects were also asked to answer some questions related to the euro and to the European Monetary Union.

Population and Samples for each Phase of the two Studies

Two studies were conducted: Study 1 was based on three samples of adults, whereas Study 2 was based on three samples of teenagers; each Study had three phases and different subjects were interviewed for each phase. It must be borne in mind when analysing the results, that in defining the samples they were not chosen to be representative of the general French population; subjects were selected in order to provide participants from diverse backgrounds.

Study 1: Adult Subjects

Adults were interviewed in order to test the hypothesis during these three distinct periods.

1) In the first phase, in February 2001, a group of adults was selected from Paris and its suburban area. A total of 109 subjects, with an equal number of male subjects and female subjects, were interviewed during this first phase using a face-to-face questionnaire (details on this study can be found in Nivoix & Roland-Lévy, 2002.)

2) In the second phase, 586 adult subjects from varied social backgrounds were selected; half of the sample was selected in the Paris area while the other half was selected in a more rural part of the country (around Poitiers, in the South West of France 1). The sample included a sub-group from each geographical zone, composed of 100 subjects above 50, as these participants have already experienced the change from the ‘old franc’ to the ‘new

---

1 S. Nivoix, from the CRIEF in Poitiers, collected the data in the South West of France.
franc’ in 1960. The whole sample of adults was composed of women (55%) and of men (45%). All the subjects were interviewed during this second phase, between the second week of January and the second week of February 2002 (February 15th); this corresponds to part of the limited time period during which both the French franc and the euro were used in France (the euro was introduced on January 1st and the French franc could still be used until February 17th).

3) In the third phase, 356 adult subjects from varied social backgrounds were selected; a third of the sample was selected in the Paris area while the other two thirds were selected in the same rural part of the country as in phase 2. The sample included a sub-group from each geographical zone, composed of subjects above 50. The whole sample of adults was composed of an equal proportion of women and men. All the subjects were interviewed during this third phase, between January and February 2003.

Study 2: Teenagers

Three samples of teenagers were also studied during the same three distinct periods in order to test the hypothesis.

1) In the first phase, in February 2001, a small sample of 52 French teenagers (age 14 to 18, mean age 15.6) was selected from Paris and its suburbs. Twenty-six girls and an equal number of boys, from different social backgrounds and with a large variety of types and levels of education, were interviewed during this first phase using a face-to-face questionnaire (details on this study can be found in Roland-Lévy, 2002 a.)

2) In the second phase, 205 French teenage subjects from varied social backgrounds were selected, half in the Paris area, the other half in the South West of France; this sample was composed of 107 teenage girls and 98 boys (11- to 18-year-olds, mean age 14.5). All the teenagers were interviewed for the second phase, during the same period as the adult sample, in January and February 2002 (details on this study can be found in Roland-Lévy, 2002 b.)

3) In the third phase, 372 French teenage subjects from varied social backgrounds were selected, a third of the sample was selected in the Paris area while the other two thirds were selected in the South West of France; this sample was composed of an equal number of teenage girls and boys (14- to 18-year-olds, mean age 15). All the teenagers were interviewed in January and February 2003.

Material and Procedures

In phase one, subjects’ representations of the upcoming currency were tested according to Abric’s central core hypothesis (1976, 1982, 1984), based on free association tasks. Vergès’ methodological tools were used to investigate the composition of the central nucleus of social representations (1992, 1998, 2001), both in terms of frequency and of rank of appearance of the evoked terms. According to this theory, most subjects express some of the terms belonging to the shared nucleus; this implies that these will be spontaneously produced by many subjects (high frequency); as these terms are important to the group, they will also come to mind early (referred to as low rank). Conversely, the periphery, which takes into account individuality, categorizes terms which are not shared by many and which therefore have a low frequency; the peripheral elements usually occur later, and have a higher rank. This combination of the frequency and of the rank of appearance shows the hierarchical structure of the representation.

In phase two and three, social representations of the euro were tested on the basis of the similitude between items and by way of an analysis of the connections among them (cf. Flament, 1981; Degenne & Vergès, 1973; Vergès, 1992); the goal of this technique is to explore how terms are related to each other, thus showing the internal structure of the representation. Based on an adaptation of Guimelli’s methodological tool, which involves the selection of blocks of items (1989), subjects were presented with a list of 25 items chosen from the words which had often been spontaneously produced in the first phase of the study. They had to select the 5 items that, according to them, best represented the euro, and the 5 that were least representative of the euro; all remaining items were considered neutral. The same procedure was conducted for the French franc. With this technique (which is another way of identifying the structure of the representation) involving terms chosen in both directions (as representing or opposed to the given object, here, the euro or the French franc), one can also distinguish terms which are strongly linked together, via a score of similarity and connection (“connexity”)

In both studies and in all the phases, subjects were then asked to rank a series of 6 Likert-type attitude-scales related to the new currency\(^2\). After conduction of a factor analysis all 6 scales were kept, as they proved to be relatively reliable (\(\alpha = .6590\)) When the scales were combined, they allowed an attitudinal score to be determined, a score thus defining the general tendency - positive (from 3 to 5), negative (from 0 to 2) or neutral -

\(^2\) More than 6 scales were used, but 6 of them were the same for both studies in the two phases. 

-3-
of the attitudes in the samples towards the euro. Personal characteristics (age, gender, schooling, profession, etc.) were also recorded. It took less than half an hour for subjects to complete the different steps of the questionnaires.

Results

Representations and attitudes were compared for each phase, before and after January 2002. The results obtained are presented for the two groups of subjects, adults and teenagers, for each phase of the study, respectively, pointing out, when appropriate, main gender differences. Since the samples were chosen to provide subjects from diverse backgrounds (and not to be representative of the general population in France), the results obtained are to be taken as an indication of a tendency at the time of both studies, and should not be generalised to the French population.

Before 2002 and After: Similarities and Divergences of Representations

When comparing the representations obtained before and after 2002, based first on virtual practice of the euro, and later, on a concrete daily use of notes and coins, we have to bear in mind the fact that two different methodological tools were used to study the social representations of the subjects. In phase one, subjects’ representations of the upcoming currency were tested according to Abric’s central core hypothesis, based on free association tasks, whereas in the second and third phase, representations of the euro were tested on the basis of the similitude between items and by way of an analysis of the connections among them. An adaptation of Guimelli’s methodological tool was used; subjects were presented with a list of 25 items and they had to select from this list the terms best/least representative of the franc and the euro. Because of the use of these two different techniques of approaching the social representation, the potential changes presented here after should only be taken as an indication of a tendency, thus showing a potential evolution of the representation.

Study 1: Adults

Adults’ Social Representation of the Euro

1) In phase one, one year before the concrete issuance of the euro, a sample of 109 adult subjects was interviewed. Social representation of the euro is shown in Table 1. Europe (65; 1) is the most central element of the social representation of the euro, along with money (94:1.) Other terms appear in the near periphery and could easily slide to the centre of the euro representation; for example, the notion of union which is produced with a low rank (41; 2.3.) Conversion is also spontaneously evoked (20; 2.7) and therefore potentially belongs to the near periphery of the representation. Also among the peripheral elements, subjects compare the euro with the Dollar (16; 4.2.) The fact that life will be easier with a single currency and that it will facilitate international exchange (these three terms are produced by 10 subjects each and with a medium rank of 3.5) appears in the periphery of the representation of the euro.

The French franc (cf. Nivoix & Roland-Lévy, 2002) and the euro appear to symbolize different objects, social representations of both items are linked to the concept of money. We could therefore conclude that, as seen in the theoretical introduction, in the processes involved in building a new representation, the subjects start by selecting some specific information related to a new unfamiliar object. Here we are concerned with the euro, which is clearly perceived as money used in different parts of Europe, thus providing a potential idea of union.

---

3 The first figure given in parenthesis in the text indicates the number of times the item/word given in italics was spontaneously produced; the second figure corresponds to the average rank of production of the term (the first term produced is in rank 1, the second in rank 2, and so on; the average rank is obtained by combining the various ranks of appearance of the term for all the subjects in the sample who produced that specific term).

---
Table 1. Representation of the euro (hypothetical central nucleus and periphery)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium Rank Frequency</th>
<th>Low ( \leq 2.7 )</th>
<th>High ( \geq 3.5 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High ( \geq 40 )</td>
<td>Europe: 65 (1)</td>
<td>Dollar: 16 (4,2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Money: 94 (1)</td>
<td>Easier: 10 (3,5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Union: 41 (2,3)</td>
<td>Single currency: 10 (3,5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low ( \leq 20 )</td>
<td>Conversion: 20 (2,7)</td>
<td>Exchange: 10 (3,5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The figure given in parenthesis in the tables indicates the average rank of production of the term.

2) In phase two, when the euro was concretely introduced, a sample of 586 adults was interviewed (half of them were selected in the Paris area while the other half were selected in a more rural part of the country; one hundred subjects were over 50 years old). Social representations were studied during this phase through an adaptation of Guimelli’s methodological tool, which involves the selection of blocks of items; subjects were presented with a list of items chosen from the words which had often been spontaneously produced in the first phase of the study. They had to select the 5 items that, according to them, best represented the euro, and the 5 that were least representative of the euro; all remaining items were considered neutral. The same procedure was conducted for the French franc. With this technique involving terms chosen in both directions (as representing or opposed to the given object, here, the euro or the French franc), one can also distinguish terms which are strongly linked to each other, via a score of similarity and connection (“connexity”) and thus, identify the structure of the representation.

In this phase, when looking at the terms which were most often chosen as closely linked to the euro from a list of 25 provided terms, the euro is still obviously perceived as the symbol of Europe; it was selected by 67% of the subjects as most representative of the euro (cf. Table 2 which produces percentages of terms selected, first in 2002 and second in 2003, as most representative of the euro; all terms were chosen by the subjects from the same initial list of 25 given terms.) The 586 adults interviewed now tend to have a shared representation of the euro focused around three key notions: Europe, novelty (50%) and community (46%). This last notion was not, in the previous phase, in the centre of the representation, or even in the near periphery. By contrast, other items such as money and union, which were potentially part of the former central nucleus, have now moved out of the centre of the representation, especially for the group composed of older citizens (above 50 years old); moreover, conversion is central for that group of older subjects, whereas is in the near periphery one year before the euro arrived. Europe is also significantly more often chosen by Parisians (80%), whereas novelty is over represented in the group of older people (66%).

Table 2. Percentage of terms selected as ‘best representing the euro’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paris area</th>
<th>Rural area</th>
<th>&gt; 50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novelty</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes, coins</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The first figure indicates the results obtained in 2002, the second indicates the results in 2003.

Table 3 produces percentages of terms selected, first in 2002 and second in 2003, as least well representing the euro (all terms were chosen by the subjects from the same initial list of 25 given terms.) When studying the main items selected as symbols contrasting with the euro, four terms are clearly not representative of the euro for the whole sample (the three groups of adult subjects.) The euro is perceived as not easy to use for 45% of the subjects; the Dollar, which, in the previous phase, was in the periphery of the representation of the euro, is now chosen among the terms least representing the euro by almost 45% of the subjects as not representing the euro; it is the term which is most often chosen by the older group, the difference being significant (p=.05.) The euro is not (yet?) representative of France for 37% of the subjects. The euro is not a symbol for 41% of the older group (significantly over-represented at p=.05) and also for the 25% of the subjects from the rural areas.
The structure of the representation can be identified, via the scores of connexity, by showing the terms which are strongly linked. The links between items can be graphically represented on a Kruskal tree showing how the terms are linked and organised together, for the three groups of adults.

3) When comparing the results obtained between phase 2 and 3, very few differences occur, as if the new representation was crystallizing (tables 2 & 3). When analysing the selection of terms of the 356 adults interviewed at the beginning of 2003, the representation of the euro tends to more homogeneous in the three sub-groups (Paris, rural area and with ‘older’ subjects); nevertheless some significant differences related to some of the terms chosen as ‘best representing’ the euro remain between the older group compared to the other adult samples; the euro is still representing the idea of union and uniqueness (single currency) for the younger groups, while the problems related to conversion and to specific notes and coins are still selected by the older sample. Concerning the terms selected as ‘least representing’ the euro, the most interesting result is that after having used daily the euros for one year, there are more older adults who express the fact that the euro is not easy to use.

Table 3. Percentage of terms selected as ‘least representing’ the euro.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Paris area</th>
<th>Rural area</th>
<th>&gt; 50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dollar</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The first figure indicates the results obtained in 2002, the second indicates the results in 2003.

Adults’ Attitudes towards the Euro

1) In this first phase, the attitude of the subjects was studied in two different steps. First, among the spontaneously produced terms (cf. the free associations), a large proportion of terms was neutral, while some appeared to be undoubtedly positive and others were clearly negative. When analysing the negative elements of the representation of the euro, 17.07% of all the evoked terms appear to have a clearly negative connotation (decision of four judges who agreed they were negative.) In order to have a better understanding of this attitude, let us study the results obtained with the help of the various Likert scales. The overall attitude towards the euro appears positive with this technique. The average score of the sample of 109 adults is located on the positive side of the scales (M=3.92; SD=2) (0 being entirely negative, 5 being completely positive), thus providing a positive general attitude towards the euro, even though some individuals produced extreme answers in both directions (wide dispersion.)

2) In phase two, the overall attitude towards the euro, obtained via the same Likert scales, tends to be somewhat less positive than a year before. The average score of the sample of 586 adults is closer to the centre of the scale, which indicates a more neutral attitude (M=3.07; SD=1.5.)

3) In 2003, the overall attitude towards the euro is still on the positive side but close to being neutral (M= 3.1.) When comparing the results obtained between phase 2 and 3, no significant difference occurred, as if the attitudes towards the euro were just stabilising as the use of the euro is becoming ordinary.

To conclude on the question of the data collected in study one during the first phase, for the adults interviewed, money is an undoubtedly central concept for the euro. A year before the introduction of the euro, the representation of the single currency was accompanied by a rather positive attitude towards the euro. In this phase, it seems that the subjects selected some specific information (“selection of information”) concerning the euro (unfamiliar object). During the phase of transition between the French franc and the euro, the subjects have used the previously selected information in order to reorganise their knowledge (“de-contextualising”); the representation of the euro remained focused around the idea of a shared symbol of Europe, and they shared representation of the euro fixed around three key notions Europe, novelty and community, which was not, in the previous phase, in the centre of the representation, or even in the near periphery. By contrast, other items such as money and union, which were potentially part of the former central nucleus, have now moved out of the centre of the representation. This representation goes along with by a relatively neutral attitude towards the euro. In the

* Examples of the various items which had to be evaluated on a scale from 1 to 6: “the euro facilitates everyone’s life”, “the euro makes professional exchange easier”, “the euro is very complex to use”, “the introduction of the euro is a sign of progress in the economic world, ‘the euro is a symbol of the unity of Europe’…”
third phase, the representation of the euro tends to terminate the process of objectification by reconstructing the initially unfamiliar object into something more familiar. The euro is now clearly described as the new currency used in the European Community.

Study 2: Teenagers

Investigation of Teenagers’ Social Representations

When comparing the representations obtained before 2002 (virtual experience of the euro) and later (concrete daily use of notes and coins), some overall results appear.

1) During the first phase, in 2001, the teenagers (52 teenagers) describe the euro as being the complex money of Europe. As shown in Table 4, Europe (26; 1) is the most central element of the social representation of the euro, and it is money (24; 1) which is produced by 2/3 of the subjects. For them, complexity (25; 2.6) is also extremely central; it is often linked to the difficulty of money conversion (11; 2.6.) However, the subjects consider that life will be easier (5; 3.2) with a single currency (5; 3.2) throughout the euro-zone, as it will definitely facilitate international exchange (5; 3.2); these matching ideas appear in the periphery of their representation of the euro. Other terms appear in the near periphery and could easily slide to the centre of the euro representation (for example, the notion of union (8; 2) which, when it is produced, is low in rank.) Teenagers also include, near the centre of their representation, the idea of novelty (13: 1.)

As seen in the theoretical introduction, in the processes involved in building a new representation, subjects start by selecting some specific information related to a new unfamiliar object. Here we are concerned with the euro, which is clearly perceived as money used in different parts of Europe. From this initial selected information, the subjects reorganise their knowledge, based on previous experience of the French franc, by taking it into a new European context. They are then able to reconstruct this unfamiliar object into something more familiar via a “reconstruction” into a new schema built with certain specific dimensions such as the idea of novelty and that of complexity (which is linked to the difficulty of money conversion); the subjects nevertheless hope that, as the euro will facilitate international exchange, life will be easier with a single currency throughout the euro-zone.

2) In the second phase, after the euro was introduced, when we look at the terms which were most often chosen, by the teenagers, as closely linked to the euro from a list of 25 provided terms, the euro is still obviously perceived as the symbol of Europe; it was selected by 69% of the subjects as most representative of the euro. The group of 205 teenagers now tends to have a shared representation of the euro to be formed around the idea that the euro is a European currency which might be difficult to adapt to.

As predicted by the anchoring processes, there is a cognitive dimension and a social dimension. The cognitive aspect involves the integration of a new object into the previous thoughts of individuals (e.g. the euro perceived as a currency in a similar way to the French franc); the social aspect involves the production by a social group (here, French teenagers interviewed) of a specific meaning for a representation (e.g. this could be an awareness of Europe.) These two aspects, combined with the selection of information, de-contextualising, and later reconstruction, allow a shared representation of the euro to be formed around the idea that the euro is a European currency which might be difficult to adapt to.

Table 4. Representation of the euro (hypothetical central nucleus and periphery.)

| Average Rank |
| Frequency |
| Low rank ≤ 2 |
| High rank ≥ 2.1 |

| Minority |
| ≤ 19 |
| Novelty: 13 (1) |
| Union: 8 (2) |
| Conversion: 11 (2.6) |
| Easy: 5 (3.2) |
| Single currency: 5 (3.2) |
| Intern. Exchange: 5 (3.2) |

As seen in the theoretical introduction, in the processes involved in building a new representation, subjects start by selecting some specific information related to a new unfamiliar object. Here we are concerned with the euro, which is clearly perceived as money used in different parts of Europe. From this initial selected information, the subjects reorganise their knowledge, based on previous experience of the French franc, by taking it into a new European context. They are then able to reconstruct this unfamiliar object into something more familiar via a “reconstruction” into a new schema built with certain specific dimensions such as the idea of novelty and that of complexity (which is linked to the difficulty of money conversion); the subjects nevertheless hope that, as the euro will facilitate international exchange, life will be easier with a single currency throughout the euro-zone.
Table 5. Percentage of terms selected as ‘representing the euro’, or as ‘not representing’ it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>Dollar</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New, novelty</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Easiness, easy</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes, coins</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Conversion</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When studying the main items selected as symbols contrasting with the euro, the Dollar was chosen by 50% of the subjects as not representing the euro; just after came the idea of complexity, which was selected as not linked to the euro by 45% of the sample, whereas it was a central item in the first phase. On the other hand, the impression of easiness was also chosen by a large proportion of the group as not indicative of the euro (38%). This implies that, for them, the euro is not related to the Dollar; it is not complex, or easy. The structure of the representation can be identified, via the scores of connexity, by showing the terms which are strongly linked. The links between items can be graphically represented on a Kruskal tree showing how the terms are linked and organised together. Concerning the shared representation of the former national currency, nothing has changed: the franc is still perceived by the respondents as the national currency, which symbolises France.

3) When comparing the results obtained between phase 2 and 3, very few differences occur, as if the new representation was just crystallizing. In the third phase, when we look at the terms which were most often chosen, by the teenagers, as closely linked to the euro, the euro is still obviously perceived as the currency used in Europe. The group of 372 teenagers shares a common representation of the euro (cf. Table 5.)

**Teenagers’ attitudes towards the euro**

1) As in Study one, in the first phase the attitudes of the teenagers were studied in two different steps. First, among the spontaneously produced terms (cf. the free associations), a large proportion of terms was neutral, while some appeared to be undoubtedly positive and others were clearly negative. When analysing the negative elements of the representation of the euro, it appears that, in this sample of 52 teenagers, the percentage of negative terms spontaneously produced by the subjects is significantly lower than that obtained in Study 1 with adults (who produced 17.07% of terms with a negative connotation); the teenagers interviewed produced 12.63% of all the evoked terms with a clearly negative connotation (decision of four judges who agreed they were negative.) The second step is related to the various Likert scales. The answers of the participants are rather spread out (SD = 1.55), yet by combining the results obtained through the 6 scales, the overall attitude towards the euro appears to be neutral for the 52 teenagers (M = 2.81.) (0 being entirely negative, 5 being completely positive.)

2) During the second period, teenagers’ attitudes were measured only via the average score obtained through the 6 scales put together. The overall attitude towards the euro of the 205 teenagers interviewed while the euro was first being used as the new currency is very similar to the attitude obtained before the euro came into use. It is still neutral (M = 2.7) with, this time, a smaller dispersion of answers (SD = .74), implying that subjects tend to give answers which are not so scattered.

3) When comparing the attitudes towards the euro between phase 2 and 3, the tendancy is to have a more positive (M = 3.2) attitude in 2003 then in 2002, as if the general attitude towards the euro was just building up along with the practice of a new currency.

**Comparing adults (Study 1) with teenagers (Study 2)**

1) In phase one, the sample of 109 adults had a positive attitude towards the euro (M=3.92) with a wide dispersion; whereas, during that same phase, the 52 teenagers interviewed had a neutral attitude towards the euro (M=2.81.) However, in their spontaneous production of terms linked to the euro, adults produced significantly more negative associations (17.07% of the terms had a negative connotation) than teenagers (12.63% of all the evoked terms had a clearly negative connotation.) Yet, teenagers share a common social representation of the euro which includes, in the near periphery, an operational aspect emphasizing not only the positive aspects of novelty and easiness linked to the euro, but also the complexity engendered by the new currency for the older generation, whereas adults mainly focus on a practical and functional representation of the single currency. Adults include in their representation of the euro the ideas of Europe, money and union, whereas teenagers also include Europe and money, but for them, complexity replaces the idea of union.

2) In phase two, for the 586 adults in Study 1, the euro is still perceived as the symbol of Europe. The adults interviewed, have a shared representation of the euro focused around three key notions: Europe (67%), novelty
(50%) and community (46%). In Study 2, the group of 205 teenagers also tend to have shared representation of the euro focused around three key notions: Europe (69%), union (52%) and novelty (41%). When comparing the representations of both groups, two shared common central elements appear clearly: Europe and novelty, but their third choice differs: community chosen by adults, is replaced by union for the teenagers (this last term belonged to the centre of the representation of adults in the first phase and was not in the centre of the representation of teenagers during the same phase.) In fact, one could assume that these two terms are almost equivalent as both are used to refer to Europe in the expressions European Community and/or European Union. When looking at the common terms rejected from the representation of the euro by both teenagers and adults, two shared terms appear, Dollar and easiness; the other terms chosen as not representing the euro differ according to the age group: complexity was mostly selected by the teenagers, whereas France and symbol were chosen by the adult sample.

3) In phase three, for the 356 adults in Study 1, the euro is perceived as the symbol of Europe. The representation of the adults interviewed, focuses undoubtedly around the idea that the euro is the money of the union. In Study 2, the group of 372 teenagers have stabilised their shared representation of the euro which is still obviously perceived as the currency used in Europe. When looking at the common terms rejected from the representation of the euro, the Dollar is clearly not linked to the euro by the adults, whereas it is evidently not representing France for the teenagers.

Discussion

The genesis and evolution of the social representation of the euro were explored in two studies involving adults and teenagers. The construction of the social representation of a new object was studied in parallel with the social representation of a well-known social object, the (former) national currency. As predicted by the anchoring processes, the cognitive aspect involves the integration of a new object into the previous thoughts of individuals (the euro is perceived as money as the French franc); the social aspect involves the production by a social group (here, adults and teenagers interviewed) of a specific meaning for a representation (the awareness of being part of Europe.) These two aspects, combined with the selection of information (money and novelty), de-contextualising (Europe instead of France), and later reconstruction (euro is money for Europe, thus bringing unity for the community), allow a shared representation of the euro to be formed around the idea that the euro is the European currency of the Monetary Union. Since 2001, when the beginning of the social representation of the euro was starting, it has evolved progressively during the following two years, keeping Europe, but swapping money for novelty, and completing it with union or community according to the age groups.

Yet, hardly no change was noted in terms of the evolution of the general attitude towards the single currency. The cognitive dimension of the attitude is linked to the representation of the euro, which is here the currency used in Europe. The affective dimension is rather positive, but close to neutral, with no clear attraction or repulsion towards the euro (no emotional aspect.) The operational characteristic, which is a predisposition towards action, is here forced onto the subjects, as in 2003 there is no more possible choice: the euro is the only currency used in the euro-zone.

References


