

The social representation of economic crisis in different social groups

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Introduction

This study takes part into a wider international research, started in 2009 and coordinated by prof. Ida Galli for the “*Mediterranean Center for the study of Social Representations (CeMeRS)*”.

Countries and members of the equipe involved:

- ▶ Italy: prof. Galli, and Fasanelli
- ▶ France, prof. Bouriche
- ▶ Greece, prof. Geka
- ▶ Romania, prof. Iacob & Iacob
- ▶ With the contribution of prof. Markova from United Kingdom.

Research questions

- Do different social groups construct different social representations of the economic crisis?
- Which are the differences between SRs of economic crisis produced by different groups in the different cultural contexts taken into account?
- Are the SRsEC autonomous or in relation with other pre-existing social representations? What kind of relation do they have?
- Which was the evolution from the 2009 crisis to the 2012 one?

SR and economic objects

“Lay concepts related to economy are at the same time images, feelings, opinions, fragments of ideology and cultural symbols. The theory of social representations enables the investigation of such a complex set, suggesting that representations of economic objects or phenomena should be examined as the form of knowledge that is called common sense” (Vergès, 2001, p.19).

“L’étude des représentations sociales et économiques sert de support à la mise en évidence de facteur discriminants entre différents types de comportements financiers (épargnants et non épargnants, par exemple). (...) Selon les représentations que l’on aura, on optera pour tel ou tel comportement de consommation.” (Roland-Lévy, & Adair, P., 1998, pp. 299–300)

Theoretical approach

In the Structural Approach:

- « Une représentation sociale est un ensemble organisé d'informations, d'opinions, d'attitudes et de croyances à propos d'un objet donné. Socialement produite, elle est fortement marquée par des valeurs correspondant au système socio-ideologique et à l'histoire du groupe qui la véhicule pour lequel elle constitue un élément essentiel de sa vision du monde. **Ensemble organisé, toute représentation a donc deux composantes: un contenu et une structure.** » (Abric, 2003, p. 59).
- « Tous les éléments de la représentation n'ont pas la même importance. Certains sont essentiels, d'autres importants, d'autres, enfin secondaires. Il importe alors, si l'on veut connaître, comprendre et agir sur une représentation, de repérer son organisation, c'est-à-dire la hiérarchie des éléments qui la constitue et les relations que ces éléments entretiennent entre eux » (Abric, 2003, p. 59).

Method

- **A Multi-method approach**

- ❖ **Descriptive phase:**

To describe the structure and the content of SR of the economic crisis

- ❖ **Interpretative phase**

To compare the SRec of every considered social group and to understand social situations in which positions, judgments and behaviors of involved participants take place

- ❖ **Comparative phase**

to underline differences among representations worked out in different cultural contexts, as better as the evolution of such representations in a different crisis moment.

The Method of Evocation (Vergès, 1992; Abric, 2003)

➤ I– Free association

participants are requested to associate the first five terms they think about the inductor

➤ II– Hierarchization

participants are asked to put the associated terms in order of importance

Additions to the method (Fasanelli, Galli, & Sommella, 2005; Fasanelli & Galli, 2009; Galli, Markova, Bouriche, Fasanelli, Geka, Iacob, Iacob, 2010).

➤ Evocation of adjectives

participants are asked to evoke the first five nouns distinguishing them from the first five adjectives they think about the inductor

➤ Justification for every evoked term

Subject are asked to give reasons for their choices for every term associated to the inductor.

Participants to the research

- ▶ In each country involved (France, Italy, Greece and Romania) and in both 2009 and 2012 data collecting, groups of participants have been selected among **four different socio-economic categories**:
 - Shopkeepers,
 - Bank clerks of medium level,
 - University students attending the second/third year at Faculty of Economics,
 - Lay thinkers
- ▶ 30 participants for each category (N=120 for each country) balanced on gender (15 F – 15 M);

Italian sample average age:

•Students	2009: $\mu = 20,03$; SD = 1,189/ 2012: $\mu = 21,76$; SD = 1,675
•Bank clerks	2009 $\mu = 41,97$; SD = 7,595/2012: $\mu = 42,33$;SD = 7,434
•Shopkeepers	2009 $\mu = 43,23$;SD = 0,833/2012: $\mu = 41,16$; SD = 8,686
•Laypeople	2009 $\mu = 42,77$; SD =10,170/2012: $\mu = 50,83$; SD =7,625

Strategies of data collecting

- A face-to-face interview made up ad hoc:
 - **Structure**
 - Hierarchized evocations;
 - Questionnaire of characterization (added in 2012)
 - **Content**
 - In 2009 semi-directive interview; in 2012 directive interview, constructed starting from the following dimensions:
 - ✓ cognitive-evaluative aspects about the structure of the representation (central core and peripheral elements);
 - ✓ descriptive-defining aspects of the representation;
 - ✓ informative sources and interaction networks;
 - ✓ level of involvement/implication and distance from the object;
 - ✓ relationship between representation and social practices;
 - ✓ perceptions and categorizations (causes, responsibilities, duration/evolution, solutions, positive implications, UE's role).

Students 2009/2012

		<i>importance</i>	
		< 2.5 < 2.6	≥ 2.5 < 2.7
<i>fréquence</i>	≥ 9	Increase of poverty Loss of work	Ref. Government/Institutions Ref. to economy Ref. to finance Negative experience and feelings
	≥ 11	Loss of work	High cost of living Uncertainty, fear of the future Less money to spend Ref. to economy
	< 9	« It's euro's fault ! »	Bank at the origin High cost of living Crisis of firms Slump of consumptions Slump of purchasing power Insolvency of debts and loans To spend less money
	< 11	Increase of poverty Incapacity of politics Taxes Victims	Bank cause Bank effect Other causes of crisis Crisis of firms Ref. to finance generalized distrust Hope in possible solutions Social tension

Bank clerks 2009/2012

		<i>i m p o r t a n c e</i>	
		$< 2.5 < 2.5$	$\geq 2.5 \geq 2.5$
<i>f r é q u e n c e</i>	≥ 7	Loss of work	Increase of poverty Slump of purchasing power Ref. Government/Institutions Neg. experience and feelings
	≥ 9	Loss of work	Uncertainty, fear of the future To spend less Hope in possible solutions
	< 7	High cost of living	Crisis of firms Slump of consumptions Difficulties in general Insolvency of debts-loans Ref. to economy Ref. to finance To spend less
	< 9	High cost of living Victims	Globalism Incapacity of politics Insolvency of debts-loans Necessity/perception of change Reduction of savings and investments Reduction purchasing power Ref. To economy Ref. to finance Generalized distrust Social tension

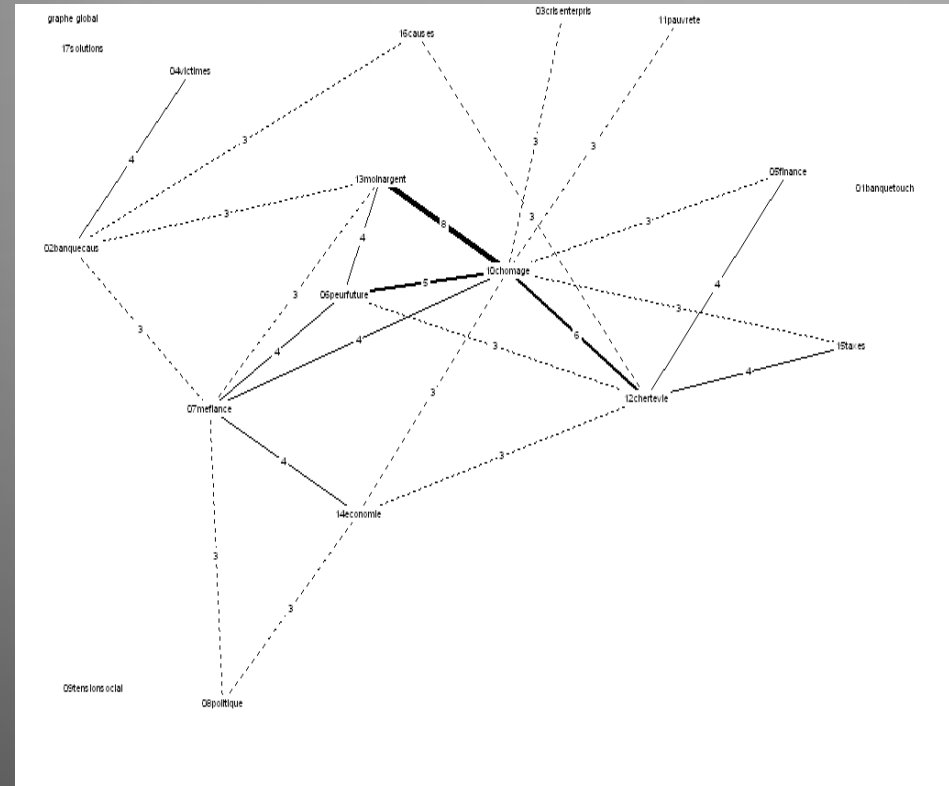
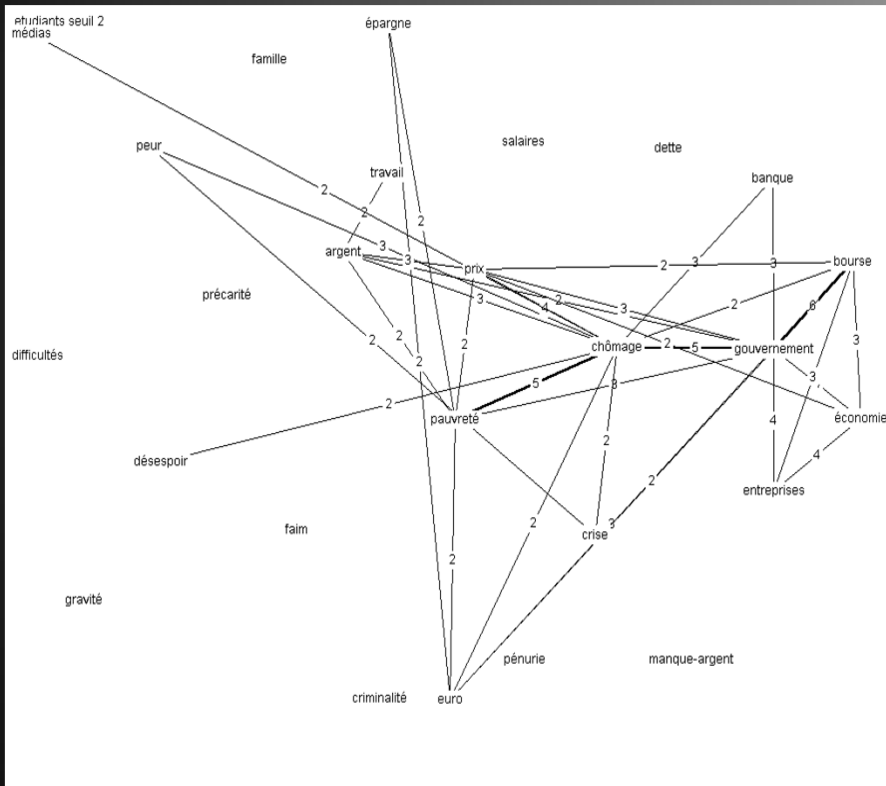
Shoopkeepers 2009/2012

		<i>importance</i>	
		< 2.5 < 2.5	≥ 2.5 ≥ 2.5
<i>fréquence</i>	≥ 7	Increase of poverty	Slump of purchasing power Loss of work Ref. to economy To spend less money Neg. experience and feelings
	≥ 11	Loss of work Uncertainty, fear of the future	High cost of living Less money to spend Neg. experience and feelings Incapacity of politics
	< 7	Families hit Slump of consumptions	Bank at the origin Lack of liquidity High cost of living Crisis of firm Difficulties in general Sensation de malaise Uncertainty of the future Insolvency of debts and loans Ref. to Government/Institutions
	< 11	Increase of poverty	Euro Ref. to finance and economy Lack of culture Possible solutions Specificities of commercial activities Taxes Victims

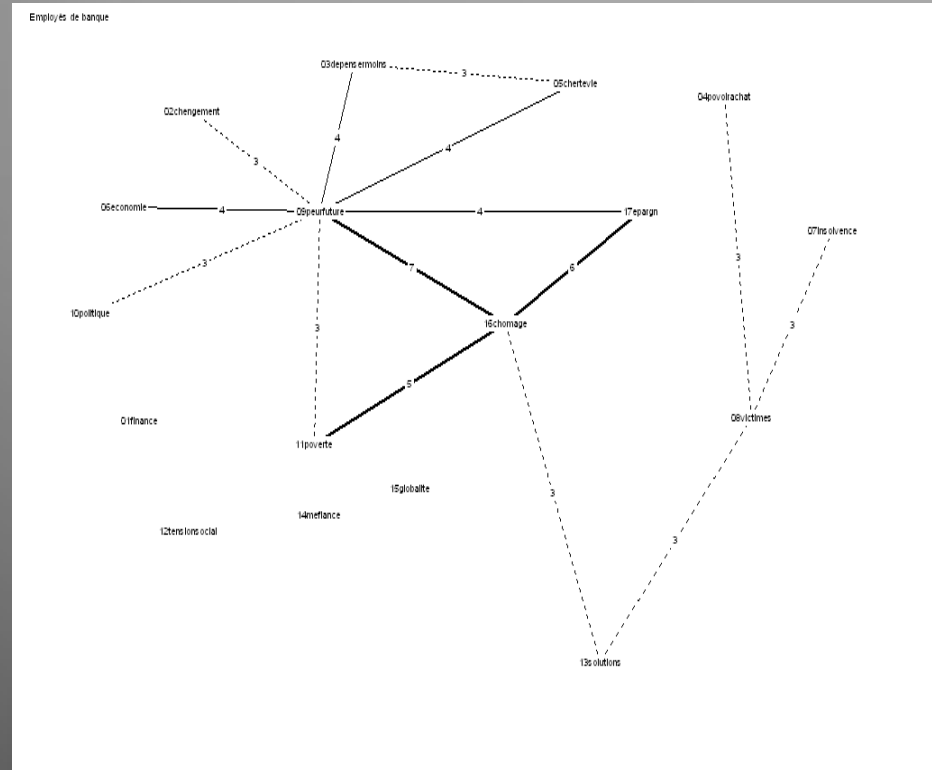
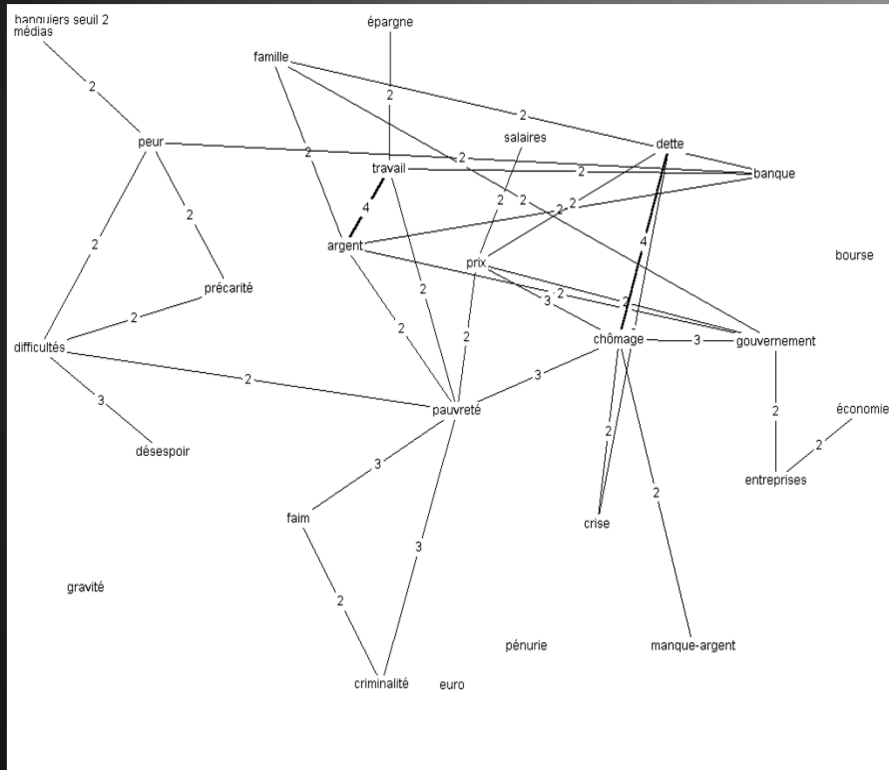
Lay thinkers 2009/2012

		<i>i m p o r t a n c e</i>	
		$< 2.5 < 2.6$	$\geq 2.5 \geq 2.6$
<i>f r é q u e n c e</i>	≥ 10	Slump of purchasing power Loss of work	High cost of living
	≥ 10	Loss of work	High cost of living Uncertainty, fear of the future Incapacity of politics Less money to spend Ref. to economy
	< 10	Uncertainty of the future Ref. to economy	Accrois. pauvreté Familles frappées Licenciement Réf. à la finance Vécus et sentiments négatifs Banques origine Effondrement des consom. Réf. Gouv./Institutions Dépenser moins
	< 10	Possible solutions Neg. experience and feelings	Increase of poverty Other causes of crisis Worsening quality of life Ref. to finance Role of Europe Taxes

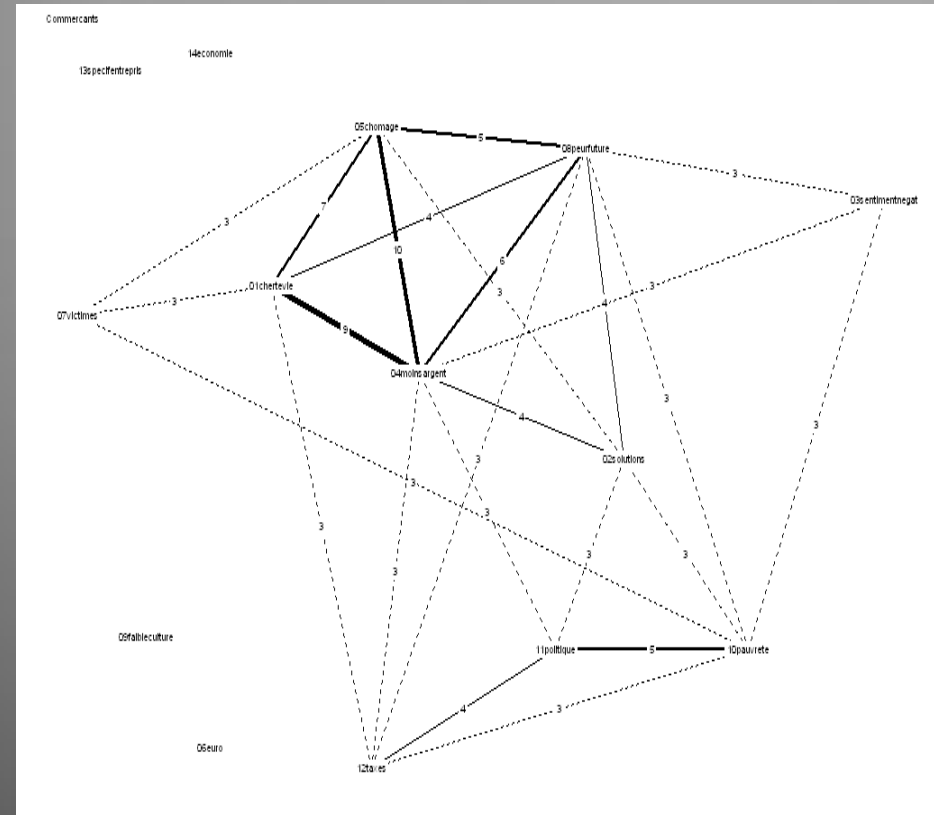
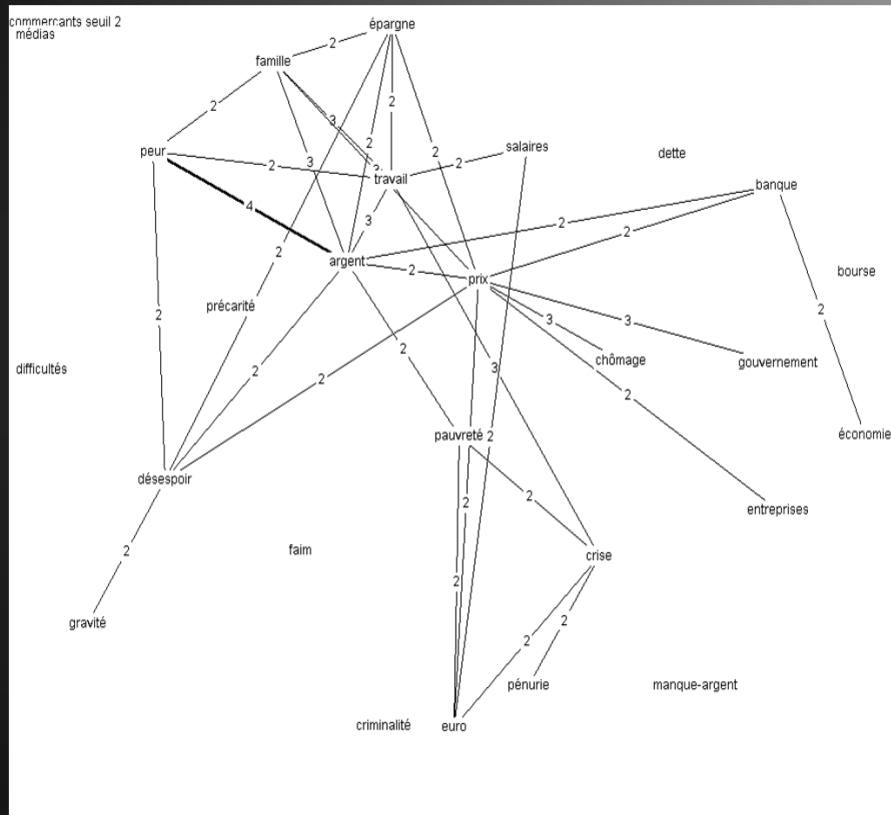
Students 2009/2012



Bank clerks 2009/2012



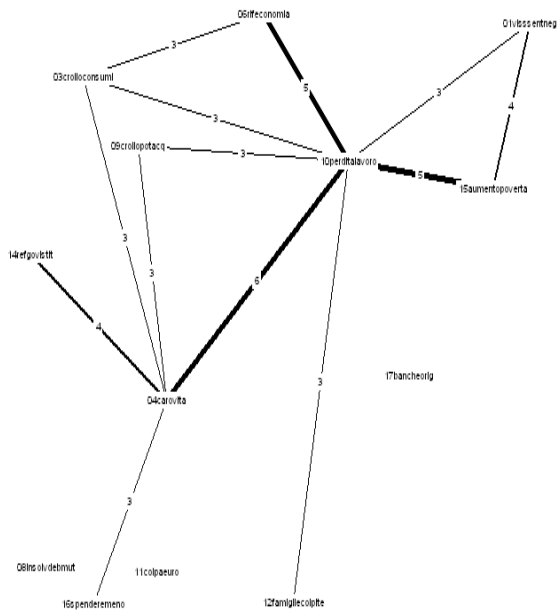
Shopkeepers 2009/2012



Laythinkers 2009/2012

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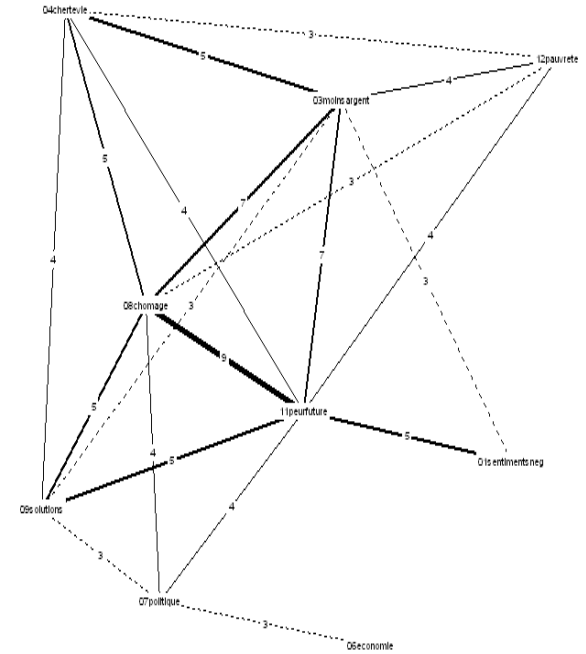


citoyens ordinaires

02: finance

10: europe

14: cauzes



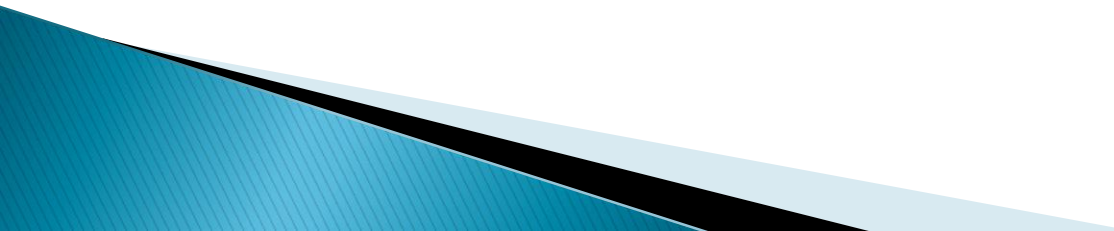
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Until now..

- ▶ New elements in 2012 structures are:
 - Uncertainty of the future (of my country, of my family, of my economic conditions, of young people) appears in every structure
 - The references to government and institutions – in 2009 more general– become more specifically “Incapacity of politics”
 - We have always references to possible solutions/ hope in possible solutions
 - Strong stability of the social representations’ structures
 - In 2009, as in 2012, the central elements are almost the same in every structure (there is always “Loss of work”).
 - In 2009 as in 2012, there are many elements (bank, institutions, etc.), that show a semantic ambivalence (cause/effect, solution/ problem) to make us suppose to be in presence of a paradoxical representation.

For the future...

- ▶ Verify the centrality of the nucleus' elements analyzing data from the “questionnaire of characterization”
 - ▶ Compare the contents of the SRs of economic crisis 2009/2012 to better understand the evolution, as well as the differences intra-inter groups
 - ▶ Compare the SR of economic crisis in the different cultural contexts considered.
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“When we wonder how and why this knowledge changes, how and why it shapes and changes our economic life, there lies the problem” (Moscovici, 2001, p.11).

Thank you for your attention!

