Post-Christmas newsletter delays are becoming a habit. Apologies, but rest assured this is not because of a lack of news and material. Behind the scenes my diversification from pure transit maps continues apace.

Date for your diary
The third Schematic Mapping Workshop will be held on 21st/22nd April, 2022, at Universität Würzburg, Germany. The workshop website includes the full scope and submission timetable. Reports on all aspects of schematic map research are most welcome. The portal for submissions opens in April 2021 and we are happy to take questions about these at submissions@schematicmapping.org.

Map of the Month: Mapping the 2021 Dutch Elections
Elections recently took place in The Netherlands, where voters were presented with a choice of thirty seven national parties. For anglophone readers, more used to single-digit quantities of national parties, this seems utterly bewildering. The Dutch might possibly have reached the same conclusion because Pro Demos, the Dutch parliamentary organisation, created the StemWijzer in which voters could identify their views on 30 issues, selected by Pro Demos, so that they could determine which party or parties were most closely aligned with their own views (although only thirty of the thirty seven parties supplied positions).

Having set myself the personal challenge of creating the map, it soon began to dawn on me that this was going to be my hardest ever design. Thirty parties meant thirty separate lines to show and, at first glance, there was very little in the way of systematicity to responses, or correlations between parties. For my first attempt, I tried to create a single spine as the basis of map by looking for the longest corridor of greatest agreement. This had worked well for our Brexit maps, each of which had a clear genuine spine. However, for elections, in retrospect, this was a mistake.

This was my first case where a bottom-up approach to design, letting the data organise the map on its own terms, wasn’t going to work. Instead, I tried a top-down approach, coding the responses of pro/abstain/against as 1/0.5/0 and looking at correlations between the parties in their policy statements. On the basis of these, it was possible to perform an informal cluster analysis, yielding two distinct political blocs in Dutch politics, with small/zero/negative correlations across the divide.

Now I had a basis for organising the map. I selected two candidates for cluster centres, PVDD on one side because of its central location, and FVD–JA21 on the other because that pair of parties had the highest correlation, giving me at least some chance of creating a spine. [With much more time, I would also have...
investigated an Oprecht-BBB-TON spine also, it seems Cluster 1 has a less distinct centre of gravity than Cluster 2.

The other difficulty for this design was how to show policy decisions. The obvious solution: show stations combining those parties in favour of a policy (and parties not calling there being assumed to be against the policy) would not have worked because, on some issues, certain parties had abstained. Hence, the map took on the structure of my recorder fingering map, with explicit pairs of stations for every issue.

I deliberately organised the map into four rough quartiles from the top downwards: (a) clear correlated responses for Cluster 1 parties (but not clear correlated responses for Cluster 2); then (b) clear correlated responses for Clusters 1 and 2; (c) clear correlated responses for Cluster 2 only; and (d) no clear correlations. This gave me two reasonably coherent spines on either side of the map, and I tried to order the questions to maximise this. However, I suspect that this particular project is better suited to computerised number-crunching than human intuition.

Overall, the result is enormous: large quantities of parties flipping from one side to the other, question by question, creates all sorts of sizing issues and I feel that the best way to characterise this creation is as the scarf of Dutch political doom. I’m not sure whether the map gave me any other insights except to reinforce my prejudice that Dutch politics is somewhat fragmented and arbitrary, but I know that a large number of my newsletter readers are interested in data visualisation and automated design. I would love to see what they might come up with instead.

The full map is far too large to include at a reasonable resolution for mailing, so do [click here](#) to download something more readable! The next newsletter will follow very soon and, with spring finally arrived, Paris seems like a good destination for the next Map of the Month. To find out what is in store, subscribe to my newsletter at [www.tubemapcentral.com](http://www.tubemapcentral.com).

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