Title

Protein interaction energy landscapes are shaped by functional and also non-functional

partners

Authors

H. Schweke[a], MH. Mucchielli[ab], S. Sacquin-Mora[c], W. Bei[a], A. Lopes[a]

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Authors affiliations

[a] Institute for Integrative Biology of the Cell (I2BC), CEA, CNRS, Univ. Paris‑Sud,

Université Paris‑Saclay, 91198, Gif‑sur‑Yvette cedex, France

[b] Sorbonne Universités, UPMC Univ Paris 06, UFR927, F-75005 Paris, France.

[c] Laboratoire de Biochimie Théorique, UPR 9080 CNRS Institut de Biologie Physico-

Chimique, Paris, France

Author contributions

HS performed research

HS, MHM, SSM, WB, AL analyzed data

HS, MHM, AL designed research

HS, MHM, AL wrote the paper

AL conceived the project

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Corresponding author

Anne Lopes, Institute for Integrative Biology of the Cell (I2BC), CEA, CNRS, Univ. Paris-

Sud, Université Paris-Saclay, 1 avenue de la Terrasse, 91198 Gif-sur-Yvette, France.

Tel: +33 (0)1 69 15 35 60

email: anne.lopes@u-psud.fr

Abstract

In the crowded cell, functional and non-functional interactions undergo severe competition.

Understanding how a protein binds the right piece in the right way in this complex jigsaw

puzzle is crucial and difficult to address experimentally. To interrogate how this competition

constrains the behavior of proteins with respect to their partners or random encounters, we (i)

performed thousands of docking simulations to systematically characterize the interaction

energy landscapes of functional and non-functional protein pairs and (ii) developed an

original theoretical framework based on two-dimensional energy maps that reflect the

propensity of a protein surface to interact. Strikingly, we show that the interaction propensity

of not only binding sites but also of the rest of protein surfaces is conserved for homologous

partners, and this feature holds for both functional and non-functional partners. We highlight a

new role for non-interacting regions in preventing non-functional interactions and guiding the

interaction process toward functional interactions.

Introduction

Biomolecular interactions are central for many physiological processes and are of utmost

importance for the functioning of the cell. Particularly protein-protein interactions have

attracted a wealth of studies these last decades (Garzón et al., 2016; Janin et al., 2008; Nobeli

et al., 2009; Nooren and Thornton, 2003; Robinson et al., 2007). The concentration of

proteins in a cell has been estimated to be approximately 2-4 million proteins per cubic

micron (Milo, 2013). In such a highly crowded environment, proteins constantly encounter

each other and numerous non-specific interactions are likely to occur (McGuffee and Elcock,

2010; Yu et al., 2016). For example, in the cytosol of *S. cerevisiae* a protein can encounter no

less than 2000 different proteins (Levy et al., 2014). In this complex jigsaw puzzle, each

protein has evolved to bind the right piece in the right way (positive design) and to prevent

misassembly and non-functional interactions (negative design) (Deeds et al., 2007; Garcia-

Seisdedos et al., 2017; Karanicolas et al., 2011; Pechmann et al., 2009; Richardson and

Richardson, 2002).

Consequently, positive design constrains the physico-chemical properties and the evolution of

protein-protein interfaces. Indeed, a strong selection pressure operates on binding sites to

maintain the functional assembly. For example, homologs sharing at least 30% sequence

identity almost invariably interact in the same way (Aloy et al., 2003). Conversely, negative

design prevents proteins to be trapped in the numerous competing non-functional interactions

inherent to the crowded environment of the cell. Particularly, the misinteraction avoidance

shapes the evolution and physico-chemical properties of abundant proteins, resulting in

slower evolution and less sticky surfaces than what is observed for less abundant ones

(Drummond and Wilke, 2008; Heo et al., 2011; Levy et al., 2012; Pál et al., 2001; Yang et al.,

2012; Zhang et al., 2008). The whole surface of abundant proteins is thus constrained,

preventing them to engage deleterious non-specific interactions that could be of dramatic

impact for the cell at high concentration (Levy et al., 2012). Recently, it has been shown in *E.*

coli that the net charge as well as the charge distribution on protein surfaces affect the

diffusion coefficients of proteins in the cytoplasm (Schavemaker et al., 2017). Positively

charged proteins move up to 100 times more slowly as they get caught in non-specific

interactions with ribosomes which are negatively charged and therefore, shape the

composition of the cytoplasmic proteome (Schavemaker et al., 2017).

All these studies show that both positive and negative design effectively operate on the whole

protein surface. Binding sites are constrained to maintain functional assemblies (i.e.

functional binding modes and functional partners) while the rest of the surface is constrained

to avoid non-functional assemblies. Consequently, these constraints should shape the energy

landscapes of functional and non-functional interactions so that non-functional interactions do

not prevail over functional ones. This should have consequences (i) on the evolution of the

propensity of a protein to interact with its environment (including functional and non-

functional partners) and (ii) on the evolution of the interaction propensity of the whole surface

of proteins, non-interacting surfaces being in constant competition with functional binding

sites. Concretely, we can hypothesize that the interaction propensity of the whole surface of

proteins is constrained during evolution in order to (i) ensure that proteins correctly bind

functional partners, and (ii) limit non-functional assemblies as well as interactions with non-

functional partners.

In this work, we focus on protein surfaces as a proxy for functional and non-functional

protein-protein interactions. We investigate their ability to interact with native and non-native

partners and ask whether their interaction propensity is conserved during evolution. With this

aim in mind, we performed large-scale docking simulations to characterize interactions

involving either native-related partners or arbitrary partners. Docking simulations enable to

energetically characterize all possible interactions involving either functional or arbitrary

partners, and thus to simulate the interaction of arbitrary partners which is very difficult to

address with experimental approaches. Docking algorithms are now fast enough for large-

scale applications and allow for the characterization of interaction energy landscapes for

thousand of protein couples. Typically, a docking simulation takes from a few minutes to a

couple of hours on modern processors (Fiorucci and Zacharias, 2010; Pierce et al., 2011;

Ritchie and Venkatraman, 2010), opening the way for extensive cross-docking experiments

(Lopes et al., 2013; Ohue et al., 2013; Vamparys et al., 2016; Wass et al., 2011). Protein

docking enables to explore the interaction propensity of the whole protein surface by

simulating alternative binding modes. Here, we performed a cross-docking experiment

involving 72 selected proteins docked with their native-related partners and their

corresponding homologs, as well as arbitrary partners and their corresponding homologs. We

represented the interaction energy landscape resulting from each docking calculation with a

two dimensional (2-D) energy map in order to (i) characterize the propensity of all surface

regions of a protein to interact with a given partner (either native-related or not) and (ii) easily

compare the energy maps resulting from the docking of a same protein with different

homologous partners, thus addressing the evolution of the propensity of the whole protein

surface to interact with homology-related partners either native or arbitrary.

Results

The interaction propensity of a protein to interact either with native or arbitrary partners is conserved during evolution

We ask whether the propensity of a protein surface to interact with native-related homologous partners is conserved among homologous ligands, and whether this remains true for arbitrary homologous partners. Arbitrary pairs refer to pairs of proteins for which no interaction between them or their respective homologs has been experimentally characterized in the Protein Data Bank (Berman et al., 2000). To test the aforementioned hypothesis, we built a database comprising 72 protein structures divided into 12 structural homolog families (Table S1). Each family displays different degrees of structural variability and sequence divergence in order to see the impact of these properties on the conservation of the interaction propensity inside a protein family. Each family has at least a native-related partner family (Fig. S1). We performed a cross-docking experiment using the ATTRACT software (Fiorucci and Zacharias, 2010) on all possible protein pairs in the database (Fig. 1*A* and *Materials and Methods*). ATTRACT enables a homogenous and exhaustive conformational sampling and is well suited to investigate the propensity of the whole surface of a protein to interact with a given ligand. For each docking calculation, we produced a 2-D energy map, which provides the distribution of interaction energies for all docking solutions over the whole receptor surface (Fig. 1*B* and *Materials and Methods*, Fig. 2*A-C*). Consequently, energy maps reflect the propensity of the whole surface of a protein (namely, the receptor) to interact with the docked partner (namely, the ligand). Because energy maps computed for two unrelated receptors are not comparable, the procedure is ligand-centered and focuses on the comparison of energy maps produced with different ligands docked with the same receptor. The comparison of two energy maps enables to evaluate the similarity of the interaction

propensities of a receptor with the two corresponding ligands. To prevent any bias, each

protein plays alternatively the role of receptor and ligand leading to a total of 72x72 docking

calculations.

Fig. 3*A* represents the energy maps computed for the receptor 2AYN_A, the human ubiquitin

carboxyl-terminal hydrolase 14 (family UCH) docked with (i) its native partner (1XD3_B,

ubiquitin-related family), a homolog of its partner (1NDD_B) and (ii) two arbitrary

homologous ligands (1YVB_A and 1NQD_B from the papain-like family). For all four

ligands, either native-related or arbitrary partners, docking calculations lead to an

accumulation of low-energy solutions (hot regions in red) around the two experimentally

known binding sites of the receptor. The first one corresponds to the interaction site with the

native partner, ubiquitin (pdb id 2ayo). The second one corresponds to its homodimerisation

site (pdb id 2ayn). This indicates that native-related but also arbitrary partners tend to bind

onto the native binding sites of native partners as observed in earlier studies (Fernandez-Recio

et al., 2004; Vamparys et al., 2016). The same tendency is observed for all 72 ligands in the

database (Fig. 3*B*). Their 20 best docking poses systematically tend to accumulate in the

vicinity of the two native interaction sites. Whereas the low-energy solutions for most ligands

accumulate around the same interaction sites (i.e. the native binding sites), we observe that,

globally, 2-D energy maps (i) seem to be more similar between ligands of a same family than

between ligands belonging to different families (Fig. 3*A*). The two energy maps obtained with

the ligands of the native-related partners family both reveal two sharp hot regions around the

native sites and a subset of well-defined cold regions (i.e. blue regions corresponding to high

energy solutions) placed in the same area in the map's upper-right quadrant. In contrast, the

energy maps obtained for the two ligands of the papain-like family display a large hot region

around the two native binding sites of the receptor, extending to the upper-left and bottom-

right regions of the map, suggesting a large promiscuous binding region for these ligands.

We ask whether the observation made for the receptor 2AYN_A that energy maps produced

by homologous ligands are more similar than those produced by unrelated ones can be

generalized to all proteins of the dataset. Therefore, we systematically compared the energy

maps produced for a single receptor docked successively with the 72 ligands of the dataset by

calculating the Manhattan distance between each pair of maps (see *Materials and Methods*).

To prevent any bias from the choice of the receptor, the procedure was repeated for each

receptor of the dataset. Fig. 4 represents the boxplots of energy map pairwise distances

calculated between random ligand pairs or between homologous ligand pairs docked with

their native-related partners or with arbitrary partners. Homologous ligands docked either

with their native-related partners or arbitrary partners display significantly lower energy map

distances than random ligand pairs (Wilcoxon test $p = 0$). This indicates that energy maps

produced by homologous ligands docked with a given receptor are more similar than those

produced with non-homologous ligands. Interestingly, this observation holds whether the

receptor-ligand pair is a native pair or not.

Energy maps are specific to protein families

The results presented above prompt us to assess the extent to which energy maps are specific

to ligand families. Therefore, we tested our ability to predict the homologs of a given ligand

based only on the comparison of its energy maps with those of the other ligands. For each

receptor, we built an energy map distance (EMD) matrix, where each entry (i,j) corresponds

to the similarity between the energy maps of ligands i and j respectively docked with that

receptor (Fig. 1*C* and *Materials and Methods*). The 72 resulting EMD matrices (Fig. 1*D* and

Materials and Methods), are then averaged in an averaged distances matrix (ADM). Each

entry of the ADM corresponds to the similarity between two sets of 72 energy maps produced

by two different ligands and reflects the behavior similarity for these two ligands docked on

each receptor in the dataset. We computed a receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve

from the ADM (see Fig. 1*E* and *Materials and Methods*) which evaluates our capacity to

discriminate the homologs of a given ligand from non-homologous ligands by comparing

their respective energy maps computed with all 72 receptors of the dataset. The true positive

set consists in the homologous protein pairs while the true negative set consists in any

homology-unrelated protein pair. The resulting Area Under the Curve (AUC) is equal to 0.8

(Fig. 5). We evaluated the robustness of the ligand's homologs prediction depending on the

size of the receptor subset with a bootstrap procedure by randomly removing receptor subsets

of different sizes (from 1 to 71 receptors). The resulting AUCs range from 0.777 to 0.801, and

show that from a subset size of five receptors, the resulting prediction accuracy no longer

significantly varies (risk of wrongly rejecting the equality of two variances (F-test) >5%), and

is thus robust to the nature of the receptor subset (Fig. S2). All together, these results indicate

that energy maps are specific to ligand families and that homology relationships between

protein ligands can be detected solely on the basis of the comparison of their energy maps.

Interestingly, this observation holds for families displaying important sequence variations

(Table S1). For example, the AUC computed for the UCH and ubiquitin-related families are

0.95 and 0.88 respectively despite the fact that the average sequence identity of these families

does not exceed 45% (Fig. S3 and Table S1). This indicates that energy maps are similar even

for homologous pairs displaying large sequence variations.

We then specifically investigate the similarity of the energy maps produced by ligands

belonging to a same family in order to see whether some ligands behave energetically

differently from the rest of their family members. On the 72 ligands, only five (2L7R_A,

4BNR_A, 1BZX_A, 1QA9_A, 1YAL_B) display energy maps that are significantly different

from those of their related homologs (Z-tests *p-values* for the comparison of the averaged

distance of each ligand with their homologs versus the averaged distance of all ligands with

their homologous ligands ≤ 5%). In order to identify the factors leading to differences

between energy maps involving homologous ligands, we computed the pairwise sequence

identity and the root mean square deviation (RMSD) between the members of each family.

Interestingly, none of these criteria can explain the energy map differences observed within

families (Fisher test *p* of the linear model estimated on all protein families >0.1) (see Fig. 6*B-*

C for the ubiquitin-related family, Fig. S4-S14 *B-C* for the other families, and Table S2 for

details). Fig. 6*A* represents a subsection of the ADM for the ubiquitin-related family (i.e. the

energy map distances computed between all the members of the ubiquitin-related family and

averaged over the 72 receptors). Low distances reflect pairs of ligands with similar energy

behaviors (i.e. producing similar energy maps when interacting with the same receptor) while

high distances reveal pairs of ligands with distant energy behaviors. 2L7R_A distinguishes

itself from the rest of the family, displaying high-energy map distances with all of its

homologs. RMSD and sequence identity contribute modestly to the energy map distances

observed in Fig. 6*A* (Spearman correlation test $p^{RMSD} = 0.01$ and $p^{seq} = 0.04$ (Table S2 , Fig.

6*B-C*)). Fig. 6*D* shows a projection of the contribution from the electrostatic term in the

energy function of ATTRACT on the surface of the seven ubiquitin-related family members

(for more details, see Fig. S15 and *Material and Methods*). Fig. 6*E* represents the electrostatic

maps distances computed between all members of the family. 2L7R_A stands clearly out,

displaying a negative electrostatic potential over the whole surface while its structural

homologs harbor a remarkable fifty-fifty electrostatic distribution (Fig. 6*D*). The negatively

charged surface of 2L7R_A is explained by the absence of the numerous lysines that are

present in the others members of the family (referred by black stars, Fig. 6*D*). Lysines are

known to be essential for ubiquitin function by enabling the formation of polyubiquitin chains

on target proteins. Among the seven lysines of the ubiquitin, K63 polyubiquitin chains are

known to act in non-proteolytic events while K48, K11, and the four other lysines

polyubiquitin chains are presumed to be involved into addressing proteins to the proteasome

(Xu et al., 2009). 2L7R_A is a soluble UBL domain resulting from the cleavage of the fusion

protein FAU (Welchman et al., 2005). Its function is unrelated to proteasomal degradation,

which might explain the lack of lysines on its surface and the differences observed in its

energy maps. Interestingly, the differences observed for the energy maps of 1YAL_B

(Papain-like family) (Fig. S4) and 4BNR_A (eukaryotic proteases family) (Fig. S5) regarding

their related homologs can be explained by the fact that they both display a highly charged

surface. These two proteins are thermo-stable (Molnár et al., 2013; Sumner et al., 1993),

which is not the case for their related homologs, and probably explains the differences

observed in their relative energy maps. The V-set domain family is split into two major

subgroups according to their averaged energy map distances (Fig. S6A). The first group

corresponds to CD2 proteins (1QA9_A and its unbound form 1HNF_A) and differs

significantly from the second group (Z-test $p = 0.03$ and $p = 0.05$ respectively). The second

group corresponds to CD58 (1QA9_B and its unbound form 1CCZ_A) and CD48 proteins

(2PTT_A). Interestingly, CD2 is known to interact with its structural homologs (namely

CD58 and CD48) through an interface with a striking electrostatic complementarity (Wang et

al., 1999). The two subgroups have thus evolved distinct and specific binding sites to interact

together. They should have different interaction propensities which probably impact their

energy maps. These five cases illustrate the capacity of our theoretical framework to reveal

functional or biophysical specificities of homologous proteins that could not be revealed by

classical descriptors such as RMSD or sequence identity.

The AUC of 0.8 calculated previously with energy maps produced by the docking of either

native-related or arbitrary pairs indicates that energy maps are specific to ligand families. To

see whether this observation is not mainly due to the native-related pairs, we repeated the

previous test while removing that time all energy maps computed with native-related pairs

and calculated the resulting ADM. We then measured our ability to retrieve the homologs of

each ligand by calculating the ROC curve as previously. The resulting AUC is still equal to

0.8, revealing that our ability to identify a ligand's homologs is independent from the fact that

the corresponding energy maps were computed with native-related or arbitrary pairs (Fig. 5).

This shows that the energy maps are specific to protein families whether the docked pairs are

native-related or not. Consequently, the propensity of the whole protein surface to interact

with a given ligand is conserved and specific to the ligand family whether the ligand is native-

related or not. This striking result may reflect both positive and negative design operating on

protein surfaces to maintain functional interactions and to limit random interactions that are

inherent to a crowded environment.

The interaction propensity of all surface regions of a receptor is evolutionary conserved

for homologous ligands

To see whether some regions contribute more to the specificity of the maps produced by

homologous ligands, we next dissected the effective contribution of the surface regions of the

receptor defined according to their docking energy value, in the identification of ligand's

homologs. We discretized the energy values of each energy map into five categories, leading

to a palette of five energy classes (or colors) (see Fig. 2*D* and *Materials and Methods*). These

five-color maps highlight low-energy regions (i.e. hot regions in red), intermediate-energy

regions (i.e. warm, lukewarm and cool regions in orange, light-green and dark-green

respectively) and high-energy regions (i.e. cold regions in blue). We first checked that the

discretization of the energy maps does not affect our ability to identify the homologs of each

of the 72 ligands from the comparison of their five-colors maps. The resulting AUC is 0.78

(Table 1)**,** showing that the discretization step does not lead to an important loss of

information.

Then, we evaluated the contribution of each of the five energy classes separately in the

ligand's homologs identification by testing our ability to retrieve the homologs of the 72

ligands from their one-color energy maps (either red, orange, yellow, green or blue) (see Fig.

1*E* and *Materials and Methods*). Table 1 shows the resulting AUCs. Interestingly, the

information provided by each energy class taken separately is sufficient for discriminating the

homologs of a given ligand from the rest of the dataset (Table 1). The resulting AUCs range

from 0.77 to 0.79 for the orange, light green, dark green, and blue classes and are comparable

to those obtained with all classes taken together (0.78). This shows that (i) warm, lukewarm,

cool, and cold regions alone are sufficient to retrieve homology relationships between ligands

and (ii) the localization of a given energy class is specific to protein families. Hot regions are

less discriminative and lead to an AUC of 0.74. In order to see how regions corresponding to

a specific energy class are distributed over a receptor surface, we summed the 72

corresponding one-color maps into a stacked map (Fig. 8-supplement 1 – see Materials and

Methods for more details). For each color, the resulting stacked map reflects the tendency of a

map cell to belong to the corresponding energy class. Fig. 8 shows an example of the five

stacked maps (i.e. for cold, cool, lukewarm, warm and hot regions) computed for the receptor

1P9D_U. Intermediates regions (i.e. warm, lukewarm and cool regions) are widespread on the

stacked map while cold and hot regions are localized on few small spots (three and one

respectively) no matter the nature of the ligand. Fig. 8-supplement 2, shows for the receptor

1P9D_U, the 12 blue and red stacked maps computed for each ligand family separately. We

can see that some cold spots are specific to ligand families and that their area distribution is

specific to families while all 12 ligand families display the same hot spot in the map's upper-

right quadrant. These observations can be generalized to each receptor. On average,

intermediate regions are widespread on the stacked maps and cover respectively 742, 1142

and 609 cells for cool, lukewarm and warm regions, while cold and hot regions cover no more

than respectively 105 and 106 cells respectively (Fig. S16). Interestingly, hot regions are more

colocalized than cold ones and are restricted to 2 distinct spots on average per stacked map,

while cold regions are spread on 3.6 spots on average (t-Test p = 9.61e-12). These results

show that ligands belonging to different families tend to dock preferentially on the same

regions and thus lead to similar hot region distributions on the receptor surface. This

observation recalls those made by *Fernandez-Recio et al.* (Fernandez-Recio et al., 2004), who

showed that docking random proteins against a single receptor leads to an accumulation of

low-energy solutions around the native interaction site and suggested that different ligands

will bind preferentially on the same localization.

We can hypothesize that hot regions present universal structural and biochemical features that

make them more prone to interact with other proteins. To test this hypothesis, we computed

for each protein of the dataset, the 2-D projection of three protein surface descriptors (see

Materials and Methods and Fig. S15): the Kyte-Doolittle (KD) hydrophobicity (Kyte and

Doolittle, 1982), the circular variance (CV) (Mezei, 2003) and the stickiness (Levy et al.,

2012). The CV measures the density of protein around an atom and is a useful descriptor to

reflect the local geometry of a surface region. CV values are comprised between 0 and 1. Low

values reflect protruding residues and high values indicate residues located in cavities.

Stickiness reflects the propensity of amino acids to be involved in protein-protein interfaces

(Levy et al., 2012). It has been calculated as the log ratio of the residues frequencies on

protein surfaces versus their frequencies in protein-protein interfaces. For each receptor, we

calculated the correlation between the docking energy and the stickiness, hydrophobicity or

CV over all cells of the corresponding 2D-maps. We found a significant anti-correlation

between the docking energy and these three descriptors (correlation test p between docking

energies and respectively stickiness, hydrophobicity and CV < 2.2e-16, see Table S3)). Fig. 7

represents the boxplots of the stickiness, hydrophobicity and CV of each energy class (see

Fig. S15 and *Materials and Methods* section for more details). We observe a clear effect of

these factors on the docking energy: cold regions (i.e. blue class) are the less sticky, the less

hydrophobic and the most protruding while hot ones (i.e. red class) are the most sticky, the

most hydrophobic and the most planar (Tukey HSD test (Tukey, 1949), *p* of the differences

observed between each energy classes < 2.2e-16). One should notice that stickiness has been

defined from a statistical analysis performed on experimentally characterized protein

interfaces and therefore between presumed native partners. The fact that docking energies

(physics-based) calculated either between native-related or arbitrary partners is anti-correlated

with stickiness (statistics-based) defined on native interfaces, strengthens strongly the concept

of stickiness as the propensity of interacting promiscuously and provides physics-based pieces

of evidence for sticky regions as a proxy for promiscuous interactions.

We show that not only the area distribution on a receptor surface of hot regions but also those

of intermediate and cold regions are similar for homologous ligands and are specific to ligand

families (AUC ranging from 0.74 to 0.79) whether the ligands are native-related or not. This

tendency is even stronger for intermediate and cold regions. Interestingly, the information

contained in the cold regions that cover on average no more than 4.9% of the energy maps is

sufficient to identify homology relationships between ligands.

Discussion

In this study, we address the impact of both positive and negative design on thousands of interaction energy landscapes by the mean of a synthetic and efficient representation of the docking energy landscapes: two-dimensional energy maps that reflect the interaction propensity of the whole surface of a protein (namely the receptor) with a given partner (namely the ligand). We show that all regions of the energy maps, including cold, intermediate and hot regions are similar for homologous ligands and are specific to ligand families whether the ligands are native-related or arbitrary. This reveals that the interaction propensity of the whole surface of proteins is constrained by functional and non-functional interactions, reflecting both positive and negative design operating on whole protein surfaces, thus shaping the interaction energy landscapes of functional partners and random encounters. While most studies that aim at depicting protein-protein interactions focus on native binding sites of proteins (Andreani et al., 2012; Chakrabarti and Janin, 2002; Keskin et al., 2005; Li et al., 2004; Lo Conte et al., 1999; Pechmann et al., 2009), we bring a new regard on protein-protein interactions by providing a systematic and physical characterization of all regions of the surface of a protein in interaction with a given ligand (i.e. cold, intermediate and hot regions). Here, we address the energy behavior of not only known binding sites, but also of the rest of the protein surface, which plays an important role in protein interactions by constantly competing with the native binding site. We show that the interaction propensity of the rest of the surface is not homogeneous and displays regions with different binding energies that are specific to ligand families. This probably reflects the negative design operating on these regions to limit non-functional interactions. We can hypothesize that these regions participate to favor functional assemblies (i.e. functional assembly modes with functional partners) over non-functional ones and are thus evolutionary constrained by non-functional assemblies. On the other side, we show that hot regions are very localized (4.9% of

the cells of an energy map) and tend to be similar no matter the ligand. Hot regions are likely

to display universal properties of binding, i.e. they are more hydrophobic and more planar,

and thus more "sticky" than the other regions. They provide a non-specific binding patch that

is suitable for many ligands. Despite the fact that hot regions are similar for functional and

arbitrary ligands, we can hypothesize that functional partners have evolved to optimize their

binding site (positive design) so that functional interactions prevail over non-functional

competing ones. Indeed, we have previously shown that the docking of native partners lead to

more favorable binding energies than the docking of non-native partners when the ligand is

constrained to dock around the receptor's native binding site (Lopes et al., 2013; Sacquin-

Mora et al., 2008). All these results suggest a new physical model of protein surfaces where

protein surface regions, in the crowded cellular environment, serve as a proxy for regulating

the competition between functional and non-functional interactions. In this model,

intermediate and cold regions play an important role by preventing non-functional assemblies

and by guiding the interaction process towards functional ones and hot regions may select the

functional assembly among the competing ones through optimized interfaces with the native

partner.

In this work, we used and extended the application of the 2-D energy map representation

developed in (Fernandez-Recio et al., 2004) to develop an original theoretical framework that

enables the efficient, automated and integrative analysis of different protein surface features.

2-D maps provide the area distribution of a given feature on the whole protein surface and

their discretization enables to specifically study a given property (e.g. protruding, planar,

sticky, positively charged, cold or hot regions for example). They are easy to manipulate and

their straightforward comparison enables (i) to study relationships between different

properties with the comparison of their area distributions on a protein surface and (ii) to shed

light on the evolutionary constraints exerted on a given feature by comparing its area

distribution on homologous protein surfaces. Particularly, this enables to highlight and

characterize hot regions on a protein surface which can be either specific or conserved for all

ligands and opens up new possibilities for the development of novel methods for protein

binding sites prediction and classification as functional or promiscuous in the continuity of

previous developments based on arbitrary docking (Fernandez-Recio et al., 2004; Lopes et al.,

2013; Sacquin-Mora et al., 2008; Vamparys et al., 2016).

Our framework provides a proxy for further protein functional characterization as shown with

the five proteins discussed in the *Results* section *Energy maps are specific to protein families*.

The comparison of their respective energy maps enables to reveal biophysical and functional

properties that could not be revealed with classical monomeric descriptors such as RMSD or

sequence identity. Indeed, our framework highlights the energy behavior of a protein

interacting with a subset of selected partners either functional or arbitrary, thus embedding

functional and systemic properties of proteins. This work goes beyond the classical use of

binary docking to provide a systemic point of view of protein interactions, for example by

exploring the propensity of a protein to interact with hundreds of selected ligands, and thus

addressing the behavior of a protein in a specific cellular environment. Particularly, exploring

the dark interactome (i.e. non-functional assemblies and interactions with non-functional

partners) can provide a wealth of valuable information to understand mechanisms driving and

regulating protein-protein interactions. Precisely, our 2D energy maps based strategy enables

to explore it in an efficient and automated way.

Materials and Methods

Protein dataset

The dataset comprises 72 protein structures divided into 12 families of structural homologs (Table S1). Each family is related to at least one other family (its native-related partners family) through a pair of interacting proteins (except the V set domain family: the two native partners are homologs and belong to the same family) (Fig. S1). Each family is composed of a monomer selected from the protein-protein docking benchmark 5.0 (Vreven et al., 2015) in its bound and unbound forms, which is called the master protein. Each master protein has a native partner (for which the structure of the corresponding complex has been characterized experimentally) in the database, which is the master protein for another family, except the V set domain family, which is a self-interacting family. When available, we completed families with interologs (i.e. pairs of proteins which have interacting homologs in an other organism) selected in the INTEREVOL database (Faure et al., 2012) according to the following criteria: (i) experimental structure resolution lower than 3.25 Å, (ii) minimum alignment coverage of 75% with the rest of the family members and (iii) minimum sequence identity of 30% with at least one member of the family. As we are limited by the number of available structures of interologs, we completed families with unbound monomers homologous to the master following the same criteria. We consider that all members of a family correspond to native-related partners of all members of their native-related partner family. To address the impact of conformational changes of a protein on its interaction energy maps, we added different NMR conformers. We show that energy map involving pairs of conformers are significantly more similar than those obtained for other pairs of homologous ligands (unilateral Wilcoxon test, $p < 2.2e\text{-}16$) showing that the conformational changes in a protein (lower than 3Å) have a low impact on the resulting energy maps (Fig. S17).

Docking experiment and construction of energy maps

A complete cross-docking experiment was realized with the ATTRACT software (Fiorucci

and Zacharias, 2010) on the 72 proteins of the dataset, leading to 5184 (72 x 72) docking

calculations (Fig 1*A*). ATTRACT uses a coarse-grain reduced protein representation and a

simplified energy function comprising a pseudo Lennard-Jones term and an electrostatic term.

The calculations took approximately 20000 hours on a 2.7GHz processor. Prior to docking

calculations, all PDB structures were prepared with the DOCKPREP software (Lang et al.,

2009).

During a docking calculation, the ligand L_i explores exhaustively the surface of the receptor

R_k (whose position is fixed during the procedure), sampling and scoring thousands of different

ligand docking poses (between 10000 and 50000 depending of the sizes of the proteins

involved) (Fig. 2*A*). For each protein couple R_k-L_i, a 2-D energy map is computed which

shows the distribution of the energies of all docking solutions over the receptor surface. To

compute these maps, for all docking poses, the spherical coordinates (ϕ, θ) (with respect to

the receptor center of mass (CM)) of the ligand CM are represented onto a 2-D map in an

equal-area 2-D sinusoidal projection (Fig. 2*B*) (see (Fernandez-Recio et al., 2004) for more

details). Each couple of coordinates (ϕ, θ) is associated with the energy of the corresponding

docking conformation (Fig. 2*B*). A continuous energy map is then derived from the discrete

one, where the map is divided into a grid of 36 x 72 cells. Each cell represents the same

surface and, depending on the size of the receptor, can span from 2.5 $Å^2$ to 13$Å^2$. For each

cell, all solutions with an energy score below 2.7 kcal/mol^{-1} from the lowest solution of the

cell are retained, according to the conformations filtering protocol implemented in (Lopes et

al., 2013). The average of the retained energy scores is then assigned to the cell. If there is no

docking solution in a cell, a score of 0 is assigned to it. Finally, the energies of the cells are

smoothed, by averaging the energy values of each cell and of the eight surrounding neighbors

(Fig. 2*C*).

For each map, the energy values are discretized into five energy classes of same range leading

to a discrete five-colors energy map (Fig. 2*D*). The range is calculated for each energy map

and spans from the minimum to the maximum scores of the map cells. The range of the

energy classes of the map R_k-L_i is equal to (maxE − minE)/5, where maxE and minE

correspond to the maximal and minimal energy values in the R_k-L_i map. Each five-colors

energy map is then split into five one-color maps, each one representing an energy class of the

map (Fig. 2*E*). The continuous, five-colors and one-color energy maps are calculated for the

5184 energy maps (Fig. 1*B*).

Comparison of energy maps and identification of ligand's homologs

For each receptor R_k, we computed a 72x72 energy map distance (EMD) matrix where each

entry (*i*,*j*) corresponds to the pairwise distance between the energy maps R_k-L_i and R_k-L_j

resulting from the docking of the ligands L_i and L_j on the receptor R_k (Fig. 1*C*). The pairwise

distance d_{Man}(R_k-L_i, R_k-L_j) between the energy maps is calculated with a Manhattan distance

according to

$$d_{Man}\left(R_k L_i, R_k L_j\right) = \sum_{n=1}^{36} \sum_{m=1}^{72} |a_{nm} - b_{nm}|$$

where a_{nm} and b_{nm} are the cells of row index *n* and column index *m* of the energy maps R_k-L_i

and R_k-L_j respectively. Low distances reflect pairs of ligands that induce similar energy maps

when they are docked on the same receptor. The procedure is repeated for each receptor of the

database leading to 72 EMD matrices. The 72 EMD matrices are averaged into an averaged

distances matrix (ADM). Each entry (*i*,*j*) of the ADM reflects the similarity of the R_k-L_i and

R_k-L_j energy maps averaged over all the receptors R_k in the dataset (Fig. 1*D*). In order to test

to what extent family members display similar energy maps when they are docked with the

same receptor, we tested our ability to correctly identify the homologs of the 72 ligands from

the only comparison of its energy maps with those of the other ligands. Because, energy maps

are receptor-centered, we cannot compare the energy maps computed for two unrelated

receptors. The procedure is thus ligand-centered and consists in the comparison of energy

maps produced with different ligands docked with a same receptor. Two ligands (i,j) are

predicted as homologs according to their corresponding distance (i,j) in the ADM. Values

close to zero should reflect homologous ligand pairs, while values close to one should reflect

unrelated ligand pairs. A Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve and its Area Under

the Curve (AUC) are computed on the ADM. True positives (TP) are all the homologous

ligand pairs and predicted as such, true negatives (TN) are all the unrelated ligand pairs and

predicted as such. False positives (FP) are unrelated ligand pairs but incorrectly predicted as

homologous pairs. False negatives (FN) are homologous ligand pairs but incorrectly predicted

as unrelated pairs. ROC curves and AUC values were calculated with the R package pROC

(Robin et al., 2011). The ligand's homologs identification was also realized using the five-

color energy maps or the one-color energy maps taken separately. The five energy class

regions display very different sizes, with median ranging from 65 cells for the red and blue

regions to 630 cells for the yellow one. To prevent any bias due to the size of the different

classes, we normalized the Manhattan distance by the size of the regions compared in the

map. The rest of the procedure is the same than those used for continuous energy maps (Fig.

1).

To visualize the area distribution of the regions of a given energy class for all ligands on the

receptor surface, the 72 corresponding one-color maps are summed into a stacked map where

each cell's intensity varies from 0 to 72 (Fig. 8-supplement 1). To remove background-image

from these maps, i.e. cells with low intensity (intensity < 17) and the areas of small size (< 4

cells), we used a Dirichlet process mixture model simulation for image segmentation (R

package *dpmixsim*) (Ferreira da Silva, 2007).

2-D projection of monomeric descriptors of protein surfaces

We computed KD hydrophobicity (Kyte and Doolittle, 1982), stickiness (Levy et al., 2012),

CV maps of each protein of the dataset, in order to compare their topology with the energy

maps. Prior to all, proteins belonging to the same families were structurally aligned with TM-

align (Zhang and Skolnick, 2005) in order to place them in the same reference frame, making

their maps comparable. Particles were generated around the protein surface with a slightly

modified Shrake-Rupley algorithm (Saladin et al., 2009). The density of spheres is fixed at

$1Å^2$, representing several thousands particles per protein. Each particle is located at 5Å from

the surface of the protein. The CV, stickiness and KD hydrophobicity values of the closest

atom of the protein are attributed to each particle. We also generated electrostatic maps

reflecting the distribution of the contribution of the coulombic term as encoded in the

ATTRACT force field on a protein surface. The procedure is slightly different: each particle i

has a +1 positive charge, and receives the coulombic value:

$$Q_i = \sum_{j=1}^{n} q_i q_j / \varepsilon r_{ij}$$

with n the number of pseudo-atom in the protein, q_i the charge of the particle, q_j the charge of

the pseudo-atom j, r_{ij} the distance between the particle i and the pseudo-atom j, and ε a

distant-dependent dielectric constant ($\varepsilon = 15 r_{ij}$). CV was calculated following the protocol

described in (Mezei, 2003) on the all-atom structures. Stickiness, electrostatics and

hydrophobicity were calculated on ATTRACT coarse-grain models. Pseudo-atom charges are

defined according to the ATTRACT force field (Fiorucci and Zacharias, 2010). After

attributing a value to each particle, the position of their spherical coordinates is represented in

a 2-D sinusoidal projection, following the same protocol as described in Fig. 2 and *Materials*

and Methods section *Docking experiment and construction of energy maps*. The map is then

smoothed following the protocol in Fig. 2.

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 Figure Legends

Table 1. The AUC are calculated from the ADM with the continuous energy maps (Fig. 2*C*),

the five-color energy maps (Fig. 2*D*) and the one-color energy maps (Fig. 2*E*) following the

protocol of Fig. 1*D*-*E*.

Fig. 1. Experimental Protocol. (*A*) A complete cross-docking calculation is realized on the

dataset of 72 protein structures. This represents 72 x 72 = 5184 docking calculations. (*B*) For

each docking calculation, an energy map is computed as well as its corresponding five-color

and one-color energy maps, with the procedure described in Fig. 2 and *Materials and*

Methods. (*C*) For each receptor, an energy map distance (EMD) matrix is computed,

representing the pairwise distances between the 72 energy maps resulting from the docking of

all ligands with this receptor. Each value (*i,j*) of the matrix represents the Manhattan distance

between the two energy maps, resulting of the docking of ligands *i* and *j* with the receptor. A

small distance indicates that the ligands *i* and *j* produce similar energy maps when docked

with this receptor. To prevent any bias from the choice of the receptor, the procedure is

repeated for each receptor of the database, leading to 72 EMD matrices. (*D*) An averaged

distance matrix (ADM) is computed by calculating the average of the 72 EMD matrices. Each

entry (*i,j*) of the resulting matrix is the mean of the (*i,j*) values of the 72 receptor distance

matrices. A low distance between two ligands indicates that, on average, these ligands induce

similar energy maps when docked with a same receptor. Inversely a large distance indicates

that, on average, these ligands induce dissimilar energy maps when docked with a same

receptor. (*E*) To assess the extent to which energy maps are specific to ligand families, a

receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve and the Area Under this Curve (AUC) are

computed from the ADM.

Fig. 2. 2-D asymmetrical representation of docking energy landscapes and resulting energy

maps. (*A*) Three-dimensional (3-D) representation of the ligand docking poses around the

receptor. Each dot corresponds to the center of mass (CM) of a ligand docking pose. It is

colored according to its docking energy score. (*B*) Representation of the CM of the ligand

docking poses after an equal-area 2-D sinusoidal projection. CMs are colored according to the

same scale as in A. (*C*) Continuous energy map (see *Materials and Methods* for more details).

(*D*) Five-color map. The energy map is discretized into five energy classes (*E*) One-color

maps. Top to bottom: red, orange, green, dark green and blue maps highlight respectively hot,

warm, lukewarm, cool and cold regions.

Fig. 3. Subset of energy maps and of ligand docking poses for receptor 2AYN_A. (*A*)

Examples of maps for the receptor 2AYN_A (ubiquitin carboxyl-terminal hydrolase (UCH)

family) docked with the ligands 1XD3_B (native partner), 1NDD_B (homolog of the native

partner), 1YVB_A and 2NQD_B (false partners). The star indicates the localization of the

experimentally determined interaction site of the ubiquitin, the circle-cross indicates the

homodimerization site of 2AYN_A. (*B*) Centers of mass (CM) of the 20 best docking poses

obtained for each of the 72 ligands of the database docked with the receptors 2AYN_A.

Receptor protein is represented in cartoon (black), its native ligand and its homodimere are

represented in cartoon with transparency (red and black respectively). CMs of the ligands

belonging to the ubiquitin-related family are colored in red, CMs of the proteins belonging to

the papain-like family are colored in blue.

Fig. 4. Boxplots of energy map pairwise distances between homologous ligand pairs from

native-related partner families, homologous ligand pairs from arbitrary partner families and

random ligand pairs. For each receptor, we computed (i) the average of energy map distances

of pair of homologous ligands belonging to its native-related partner family(ies), (ii) the

average of energy map distances of pair of homologous ligands belonging to its non-native-

related partner families, and (iii) the average of energy map distances of random pairs. P-

values are calculated with an unilateral Wilcoxon test.

Fig. 5. Receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve and its Area Under the Curve (AUC).

ROC are calculated on the averaged distance matrix (ADM) including either all pairs (blue) or

only arbitrary pairs (red) (see Fig. 1 for more details).

Fig. 6. Ubiquitin-related family. (*A*) Energy map distances matrix. It corresponds to the

subsection of the ADM for the ubiquitin-related family (for the construction of the ADM, see

Fig. 1*D*). Each entry *(i,j)* represents the pairwise energy map distance of the ligand pair *(i,j)*

averaged over the 72 receptors of the dataset (for more details, see Fig. 1*D*). (*B*) Pairwise

sequence identity matrix between all members of the family. (*C*) Pairwise root mean square

deviation (RMSD) matrix between all members of the family. (*D*) Electrostatic maps and

cartoon representations of the seven members of the family. An electrostatic map represents

the distribution of the electrostatic potential on the surface of a protein (for more details, see

Fig. S15 and *Materials and Methods*). On the electrostatic maps, lysines positions are

indicated by stars. Cartoon structures are colored according to the distribution of their

electrostatic potential. (*E*) Electrostatic map distances matrix. Each entry *(i,j)* of the matrix

represents the Manhattan distance between the electrostatic maps of the proteins *(i,j)*.

Fig. 7. Boxplots of three descriptors of the protein surface: (*A*) the stickiness values, (*B*) the

Kyte-Doolittle hydrophobicity and (*C*) the CV values, depending on the energy class. The

stickiness, hydrophobicity and CV values are calculated for each protein following the

protocol described in *Materials and Methods*. For each of these criteria, *p-values* between the

median values of two "successive" energy classes were computed using the Tukey HSD

statistical test (Tukey, 1949).

Fig. 8. Stacked maps of 1P9D_U after the filtering of cells with too low intensity and areas of

too small size. The protocol to generate stacked maps is presented in Fig. 8-supplement 1. (*A*)

Blue stacked map (i.e. stacked cold regions). (*B*) Dark green stacked map (i.e. stacked cool

regions). (*C*) Light green stacked map (i.e. stacked lukewarm regions). (*D*) Orange stacked

map (i.e. stacked warm regions). (*E*) Red stacked map (i.e. stacked hot regions). One should

notice that stacked maps of two different colors can overlap because a cell can be associated

to different energy classes depending on the docked ligands. Fig. 8-supplement 2 presents

blue and red stacked maps of 1P9D_U computed for each ligand family.

Fig. 8-supplement 1. Generation of stacked maps of a receptor. (*A*) Calculation of the 72

one-color maps (red ones in the example) of receptor #1. A value of one is associated to

colored cells while zero is assigned to white cells. (*B*) Sum of the 72 one-color maps into a

stacked map. Cell's intensity varies from 0 to 72 and corresponds to the number of time the

cell is colored over the 72 ligands. (*C*) Filtering of cells of low cell intensity (intensity < 17)

and areas of too small size (< 4 cells) with a Dirichlet process mixture model simulation for

image segmentation (Ferreira da Silva, 2007). The procedure is repeated for each color

stacked map.

Fig. 8-supplement 2. Blue and red stacked maps of 1P9D_U computed for each ligand family. (*A-L*) We compute the one-color stacked map of each family as the sum of the one-color maps resulting from the docking of each ligand of a same family with 1P9D_U.

Supplementary Files

Table S1. List of proteins in the dataset and their structural families

Table S2. Estimation of the effective contribution of the three descriptors (sequence identity, RMSD and electrostatic distance) in the pairwise ADM distances observed for each ligand pair belonging to a same family

Table S3. Spearman's rank correlation between docking energy values and three descriptors of protein surfaces

Fig. S1. Interactions between structural families of the dataset. Interactions are symbolized by links between families

Fig. S2. AUC values calculated on random subsets of receptor of different sizes

Fig. S3. Receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve and Area Under this Curve (AUC) calculated for each family

Fig. S4. Papain-like family

Fig. S5. Eukaryotic-proteases family

Fig. S6. V set domains family

Fig. S7. UCH-L family

Fig. S8. UCH family

Fig. S9. Ubiquitin activating enzymes family

Fig. S10. UBC-related family

Fig. S11. Kunitz (STI) inhibitors family

Fig. S12. Retrovirus capsid proteins family

Fig. S13. Cystatins family

Fig. S14. Cyclophilins family

Fig. S15. Generation of electrostatics, stickiness, hydrophobicity and circular variance (CV) maps

Fig. S16. Boxplots of the size (in number of cells) of each energy class for all stacked maps

688   Fig. S17. Boxplots of pairwise distances between ligand pairs of conformers or pairs of homologous ligands (i.e.

689   non-conformers pairs)

Table 1. AUC obtained with different types of energy maps

type of map	continous energy maps	five-colors energy maps	red energy maps	orange energy maps	light green energy maps	dark green energy maps	blue energy maps
AUC	0.8	0.78	0.74	0.77	0.77	0.78	0.79

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

ROC curve

all pairs
AUC = 0.8

arbitrary partners
AUC = 0.8

Fig. 5.

Fig. 6.

Fig. 7.

Fig. 8.

Fig. 8-supplement 1.

Fig. 8-supplement 2.