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THE PERCEIVED SOCIAL DISTANCE IN A TRADITIONAL MULTI-CONFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

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The Perceived Social Distance in A Traditional Multi-Confessional Community

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of a sociological study conducted in a multi-confessional community situated in the central area of Moldova, Romania. Its main aim was to establish the way in which social distance is perceived and affirmed in this rural community. We used the scale of social distance, starting from the model developed by Bogardus (1925), which has become the most frequently used method of emphasizing the acceptance or isolation of social groups. We calculated the Social Distance Index (SDI), the Social Contact Index (SCI), and the Qualitative Index of Social Contacts (QISC). Results are focused on inter-confessional issues, and conclusions reveal a community open to what is close and known, but reluctant to what is distant and less known.

Keywords: social distance; local community; local identity; inter-confessional relations.

Introduction

In this paper we exemplify the way in which social distance is perceived and affirmed in a rural community. We used the Bogardus social distance scale, which conclusively illustrates the latent desire of an ethnic group (religious or cultural by extension) to accept or reject other similar groups. Consisting of a series of statements expressing varying degrees of acceptance-rejection of the relationship with the "other", from starting a family to expelling the "other" from the country, the scale highlights progressively greater social distances in terms of attitude towards initiating a potential relationship with the representative of a different identity category. In addition, we analyzed social distance based on the social distance index (SDI), the social contacts index (SCI) and the Qualitative Index of Social Contacts (QISC).

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We will further present the results obtained following a field research in a historical area of Romania, in a predominantly Catholic, minority Orthodox and a small share of Protestant inhabitants community.

Literature Review

As we mentioned in a previous paper (Fedor, 2021, 50), this concept of social distance is associated with the scale that was developed and applied by Emory Bogardus (1925, 1933, 1947). This scale is still widely used to measure intergroup prejudice (Wark, Galliher, 2007). The design of research on social distance has not undergone major changes since its beginnings, which attests to the validity of the scale developed by Bogardus (Parrillo, Donoghue, 2005).

The concept of social distance is prolific and versatile. Social distance is a social construct, it is a product of the group to which it belongs, but it can also be seen as an individual choice, so as to be shaped according to the interests of different social agents (Leson, 2008). The concept is mainly used in the analysis of ethnic groups (Driedger, Peters, 1977; Weaver, 2008), racial groups (Morgan, 2006; Randall, Delbridge, 2005), religious groups (Bilali, Iqbal, Çelik, 2018; Brockett, Village, Francis, 2009), in multiple analysis based on race / ethnicity or religious identification (Rowatt, Al-Kire, 2020) and the list goes on.

Karakayali (2009) shows us that we are dealing with several forms of social distance. Thus, we have an affective social distance, a normative one, an interactive one and, last but not least, a cultural one. An interesting point of view is brought to us by Tusini (2022) who proposes the operationalization and use of the concept through a temporal dimension, not only through the spatial one "à la Bogardus".

Methodology

Thus, we propose to carry out an evaluation of the social distance in a traditional rural community from Moldova, namely Traian from Neamț County. The research undertaken has a quantitative character.

We used an adapted form of the Bogardus scale, which has become the most frequently used method of emphasizing the acceptance or isolation of social groups.

We calculated the following indices:

- a) The Social Distance Index (SDI), which highlights the number of social contact opportunities rejected by the respondent.
- b) The Social Contact Index (SCI) derived from the number of social contact opportunities accepted by the respondents.
- c) The Qualitative Index of Social Contacts (QISC).

As we mentioned in the previous paper (Fedor, *op. cit.*, 51-52) we resume here the way of calculating these indices. We call the description made by Robu (2011, 28), according to which "SDI represents the number of social contact possibilities rejected by a respondent; there are six possibilities of actual contact, ranging from the case of a person belonging to another group who is just a visitor in our country to his/her getting married in our country; in other words, it is the number of unfavorable answers that a participant gave to the first six items of the scale; the value of the social distance index may range between 0 (all possibilities of actual contact are accepted / very favorable attitudes towards people belonging to other groups) and 6 (all contact possibilities are rejected / very unfavorable or negative attitude towards people belonging to other groups).

SCI results from the number of social contact opportunities accepted by a respondent or, more simply put, the number of favorable s to items 1-6; the value of this index may range between 0 (all actual contact possibilities are rejected / very unfavorable attitude towards other groups) and 6 (all possibilities of actual contact are accepted / very favorable attitude towards other groups); the value of the SCI index is obviously complementary to the SDI index value (for a batch of subjects, the correlation between the two values should be perfectly negative); in other words, $SDI + SCI$ always equal 6.

QISC is the sum the weights given to each favorable answer a respondent give to the first six items of the scale; of course, the respondent's answer to item 7 should be unfavorable in order for the protocol to be valid.

The weights we have given to each favorable answer to items 1-6 were: Would you agree that a certain group be in a relation of kinship with you through marriage? (7 points), would you agree that same group be in your circle of intimate friends? (6 points) ..., up to: Would you agree that same group be just a visitor in our country? (2 points). Theoretically, the QISC may range between 0 and 27."

Results and Discussion

Demographic Data

From the viewpoint of gender-based sample distribution, 73.6% of the participants are female and 26.4% are male. As far as age-based sample distribution is concerned, the highest shares of participants are mature subjects aged between 30 and 64 years (48.4%). Older respondents over the age of 65 (34.4%) rank second. 17.2% of the participants to the study are adolescents and young people aged 0 to 29 years. As concerns their education level, most respondents are middle school graduates (27.5%), followed by high school graduates whose share is 3.3 percentage points below the first category (24.2%). There are also

higher education (4.8%), college (3.2%) and vocational school (3.2%) graduates, as well as respondents who only attended and completed the first 10 years of school (14.5%) or the primary education cycle (22.6%). There are no respondents without schooling or respondents with postgraduate education, respectively. All our respondents are Catholic.

The results regarding the social distance are presented in Table 1. We will detail them below.

Table 1 Bogardus Scale

	Orthodox	Protestants	Catholics	Muslims	Other
Be related to you by marriage	56.3%	46.9%	96.9%	4.7%	6.3%
Be in your circle of close friends	68.8%	56.3%	92.2%	9.4%	23.4%
Have them as street neighbours	76.6%	59.4%	95.3%	9.5%	35.9%
Have them as co-workers	68.8%	62.5%	92.2%	9.4%	34.4%
Be citizens of Romania	73.4%	67.2%	93.8%	9.4%	37.5%
Be only visitors in Romania	26.6%	29.7%	35.9%	34.4%	39.1%
I would force them to leave my country	3.1%	3.1%	--	37.5%	10.9%

**Source: personal data interpretation*

The quantitative analysis of the data reveals that most respondents want to be related by marriage to people of Catholic faith (96.9%). It is important to note that our respondents are reluctant to marry Muslims.

If we were to rank the respondents' preferences regarding the religious faiths that they would accept in their circle of close friends, the ranking would reveal that Catholics enjoy the highest percentage - 92.2%. According to the answers given to our questions, they are followed by the Orthodox. Protestants rank third and, again, Muslims fall on the last position. In other words, our respondents of the Catholic faith do not want Muslims in their circle of close friends.

95.3% of those taking part in the study said that they wanted to have as people of the Catholic faith as their street neighbours. The ranking in the previous paragraph is similar to that regarding the statement 'Have them as street neighbours', meaning that the Orthodox are the next category preferred by our respondents to be their street neighbours. The same goes for the statements 'Have them as co-workers' and 'Be citizens of Romania', respectively.

We found a high share, compared to other religious denominations, of respondents who said that they would force Muslims to leave the country. It is noteworthy that Muslims ranked even below the 'other ethnicities' category. This proves, once again, the reluctance of Catholic respondents towards people of the Muslim faith.

As concerns the gender-based distribution of the respondents' opinion about the possibility of their becoming related by marriage with the Orthodox, we note that 37.8% of female respondents said that they agreed with it, while as many as 35.8%

disagreed. As for male respondents, more of them would not be willing (15.1%) to become related by marriage with Orthodox, as compared to those who said that they would marry an Orthodox (11.3%). The processing of the data collected from the questionnaires enabled us to conclude that 37.5% of the respondents are aged between 30 and 64 years and want the Orthodox as their close friends. The share of older respondents (65-X) who agree with the possibility of having people of the Orthodox faith as their close friends is higher (20.3%) than that of respondents belonging to the same age group who reported the opposite (14.1%). As far as the category of respondents aged 0 to 29 years is concerned, we noted that most of them would not mind having Orthodox among their close friends (10.9%), while 6.3% would object to that. Please note the high shares of both female (51.0% of 73.6% in total) and male (20.7% of 26.4% in total) respondents who agree to have Orthodox street neighbours. 21.0% of the respondents who are high school graduates want to have Orthodox co-workers. Respondents having completed primary education (12.9%), middle school (16.2%), the first 10 years of school (8.1%), post-secondary education (1.6%), college (3.2%) and higher education (4.8%) are also in favour. 35.9% of the respondents aged 30 to 64 years (48.4% in total) agree that people of Orthodox faith should be citizens of Romania. They are followed by aged (23.5% of the total 34.4%) and young (0-29 years) respondents, whose answers were positive in 12.5% of the cases of the total 17.2% in the whole sample. One may notice that, regardless of their age, most respondents do not mind Orthodox being citizens of Romania. The findings of the statistical processing performed enabled us to conclude that all young and mature respondents said that they did not want people of the Orthodox faith to be forced to leave the country. As for the other categories of respondents, there is a very low share of individuals who wish to see Orthodox excluded from the country (1.6% of the total 34.4%), yet most of them are not in favour.

Most female respondents (54.7% of the total 73.6%) do not want to become related by marriage to Protestants. The same goes for male respondents, most of whom do not want to become related by marriage to Protestants (20.7% of the total 26.4%). According to the findings of the questionnaires applied, both respondents aged 0 to 29 years (10.9% of the total 17.2%) and those aged 30 to 64 years (29.6% of the total 48.4%) refuse to have Protestants as close friends. As one may notice, there is a higher share of older respondents who would not want Protestants to be part of their circle of close friends, compared to those belonging to the same age category who would not mind it (18.8% of the total 34.4%). The overall percentage of female respondents who do not want Protestants to be their street neighbours is 47.2%. The same opinion is shared by male respondents, the highest percentage of whom do not want Protestants as their street neighbours. Therefore, the share of male respondents who do not want to have Protestants as their street neighbours is 15.1%, which is 3.8 percentages more than those who do. Higher shares of respondents who want to have Protestant co-workers are among those who completed primary education (12.9% of the total 22.6%), middle school

(14.6% of the total 27.5%), college (3.2% of the total 3.2%) and higher education (3.2% of the total 4.8%), respectively. The share of high school graduates who do not wish to have Protestant co-workers is higher than that of their counterparts who do. Sample distribution reveals that most adolescent and young respondents want Protestants to be citizens of Romania (10.9% of the total 17.2%). Older respondents took the same view (21.9% of the total 34.4%). As far as respondents aged between 30 and 64 years are concerned, most of them are against Protestants being citizens of Romania (25.0% of the total 48.4%). Regardless of the sex of the surveyed subjects, those who claimed that they did not want Protestants to be just visitors in Romania are more numerous (18.9% of 26.4% for males and 52.8% of 73.6% for females). According to the data processing results, most respondents, irrespective of their level of education completed, do not want Protestants to be banished from Romania. However, as one may notice, some respondents who are middle school (25.9% of the total 27.5%) and high school (22.6% of the total 24.2%) graduates, respectively, believe that Protestants should be forced to leave the country.

All the male respondents who participated in the survey wanted to become related by marriage with people of the Catholic faith. On the other hand, a small percentage of the women surveyed, i.e. 3.8%, do not wish to become related by marriage to Catholic individuals, while most female subjects would not mind marrying people of the Catholic faith. The analysis of the findings of the questionnaires applied enabled us to conclude that, regardless of their level of education, most interviewees claimed that they wanted to have people of the Catholic faith among their close friends. All our respondents declared themselves willing to have street neighbours of the same religion as them (Catholic). Of the total number of surveyed subjects, most respondents are female and willing to have Catholic co-workers. Most respondents, irrespective of their age, wish individuals of the Catholic faith to be citizens of Romania. Similarly, most respondents, regardless of their education level, do not wish Catholics to be just visitors in Romania. Our statistical processing revealed that both male and female respondents would not want to see the Catholics banished from Romania, which confirms and supports the general trend.

Although most subjects, regardless of their sex, do not want to become related by marriage to Muslims, there is however a share of 3.8% female respondents who said that they would marry Muslims. We note that most respondents, irrespective of their age, do not want Muslims among their close friends. Nevertheless, there are small percentages of subjects who would not mind it and are either mature (3.1%) or aged (6.3%) individuals. The highest percentage of respondents who do not want Muslims as their street neighbours is that of female subjects (66.1% of the total 73.6%), while the lowest is that of male respondents (1.9% of the total 26.4%).

Small shares of respondents who completed primary education (3.2% of the total 22.6%), middle school (1.6% of the total 27.5%), the first 10 years of school (1.6% of the total 14.5%), college (1.6% of the total 3.2%) and higher education (1.6% of the total 4.8%), respectively, are open to having Muslim co-workers. There are equal shares, i.e. 4.7%, of mature respondents who want Muslims to be citizens of Romania and of aged respondents who are of the same opinion. Nonetheless, the highest percentages are those of subjects who, irrespective of their age, do not wish Muslims to be citizens of Romania (17.2% of adolescents and young, 43.7% of mature and 29.7% of older respondents). Most surveyed subjects do not want Muslims to be just visitors in Romania (18.9% of the male total of 26.4%, and 43.3% of the female total of 73.6%, respectively). There are more older respondents who wish Muslims to be banished from Romania (18.8% of the total 34.4%), than other subjects who do not wish that (10.9% of the total 17.2% of adolescents and young respondents, and 35.9% of the 48.4% of mature subjects, respectively).

Quantitative data analysis reveals high shares of both female (71.7% of the total 73.6%) and male (22.6% of the total 26.4%) respondents who do not want to become related by marriage to individuals belonging to other religious denominations. Sample distribution and analysis show that most respondents, except for college graduates, do not wish to have as close friends people of other religious faiths. According to our results, more than half of our respondents are female and do not want to live on the same street with people of other religious faiths (52.8% of the total 73.6%). The percentage of male subjects who refuse to be street neighbours with people of a different religious faith than theirs is 17.0% (of the total 26.4%). When asked about their view on the possibility of having co-workers of other religious faith, the highest percentage of respondents who would object to that are middle school graduates (17.8% of the total 27.5%). On the other hand, college and higher education graduates support this view. As for the question whether people of other denominations should be citizens of Romania, regardless of the age of the respondents, most of them said that they did not want people of other religious denominations to be citizens of Romania (12.5% of the 17.2% adolescents and young subjects, 29.6% of the 48.4% adults and 20.3% of the 34.4% older respondents). Most of both female and male respondents do not want people of other religious denominations to be just visitors in Romania (15.1% of the total 26.4% male respondents and 41.5% of the total 73.6% female respondents). Moreover, data analysis shows that the majority of respondents, irrespective of their level of education, disagree that people of other faiths should be banished from their country.

Social Distance - total

As we mentioned before, as far as SDI is concerned, 'there are six possibilities of actual contact in total, ranging from an individual of another denomination/ethnicity/etc. being just visitor in our country to marrying such individual; in other words, what counts is the number of a respondent's negative answers to the first six items of the scale; SCI is the number of social contact possibilities accepted by a respondent or, more simply put, the number of positive answers to items 1-6; ICCS is the sum of the shares of each positive answer that a respondent gives to the first six items of the scale'.

The results of the calculation of the indices representative for social distance are shown in table 2. Therefore, as far as the index that shows openness to other religions, minorities, etc. (social contact index - SCI) is concerned, based on the scores recorded, we may safely say that there is full acceptance of Catholics by our respondents. They are followed by Orthodox, Protestants and other religious denominations. One may also note the rejection of Muslims in general, the score of the social contact index being only 1.14.

As for the second quantitative index, the social distance index, the closer the value of the score is to 0, the greater the openness to other religious denominations. Thus, the Catholics had the lowest score, followed by Orthodox. Once again, one may note the intolerance of Catholic respondents towards Muslims.

The third column of the table contains the most important index (social contact quality index - SCQI). Considering that this index is all the more relevant as it approaches 25, as one may notice, Catholics enjoy the highest level of tolerance, with an index score of 24.3. It is noteworthy that Catholic respondents have a very strong positive attitude towards Orthodox, a strong positive attitude towards Protestants, a weak positive attitude towards other religious denominations, and a weak positive attitude towards Muslims.

According to these findings, it is safe to say that Catholic respondents are very open towards people of the same religion. They also accept the Orthodox. Protestants rank third and they are followed by other religious denominations. It should be noted that our respondents showed no openness to Muslims.

Table 2. Social Distance

Religion	ICS	IDS	ICCS
Orthodox	3.69	3.31	20.89
Protestants	2.61	4.39	16.91
Catholics	5.06	1.94	24.3
Muslims	1.14	5.84	6.65
Other	1.88	5.13	11.66

**Source: personal data interpretation*

Going further into details, female respondents showed greater openness to Catholics, Protestants and Muslims. On the other hand, male respondents attained higher scores in terms of acceptance of Orthodox and people belonging to other ethnic groups. Respondents who completed primary education are open to Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants. Respondents having completed primary education, who have a weak positive attitude towards Muslims, rank last. As far as respondents who stated in the survey that they had completed middle school are concerned, their social contact quality index in terms of openness to Orthodox is lower than that of respondents who completed primary education. Respondents who completed the first 10 years of school have a weak positive attitude towards Muslims. High school graduates do not tolerate Muslims. This is proven by their very low SCQI. Catholic respondents who are post-secondary graduates have a strong positive attitude toward Orthodox and Protestants. Respondents who are college graduates have a strong positive attitude towards Orthodox, Catholics, other religious denominations, and Protestants. Their attitude towards Muslims, however, is weak positive. The analysis of the social contact quality index readings reveals that the surveyed subjects who are higher education graduates have a strong positive attitude towards Catholics and Orthodox, a positive attitude towards Protestants and show a weak positive attitude towards Muslims and other religious denominations, respectively.

Conclusion

We have presented the above results in as much detail as possible. It is up to each reader interested in forming their own opinion.

We do not stray too far from the conclusions drawn in the paper we have previously invoked. The openness of community members to other other religious

denominations can be understood, at the primary level, based on the results presented above.

We observe a community open to what is close and known, but reluctant to what is distant and less known. We observe an openness to otherness, a permissive model of the relationship with the „other”, insofar as it is a question of multisecular coexistence with the ”other” known.

The quantitative results presented here should be supplemented with qualitative results, for a better and more nuanced knowledge of this topic.

This type of research can support the identification, description and understanding of the life of (multi)confessional communities and the implications for ethno-cultural diversity.

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