Social distance in terms of demographic features – Kosovo population study

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Abstract

Kosovo aims for development of a state over the Kosovo state identity, which includes all communities living in Kosovo. Integration of all communities in public institutions and life remains one of the challenges of Kosovo society. The social distance refers to the extent of understanding of another group, which characterizes parasocial and social relations. Another definition is the lack of availability and relations in being open to others. Bogardus states that social distance is an outcome of affective distance between members of two groups. Earlier studies have shown that the social distance or gap is related to the ethnic background, education level and earlier interaction with other ethnic groups. Also, studies have shown a link with social/political activism. Further, it has been proven that social distance is manifested at three different spatial dimensions, their own self in a reciprocal co-product: physical, symbolical and geometric. The study aims to explicate social distance in a relation with demographic records of respondents to a research undertaken in Kosovo in 2010, in which 1296 citizens (64.4% Albanians, 13.9% Serbs, 6.9% Turkish, 5% Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian (RAE), 6.9% Bosnian and 2.7% others). Social distance has been measured by asking the respondents about the groups or persons they would object in terms of neighborhood: they, who speak another language, have another religion, have homosexual orientation, etc. Comparisons of average social distance in relation with ethnic sub-groups, gender, level of education, experience in earlier trips to the countries of the European Union (EU), size of settlement and the region of origin of the respondent, show significant differences, at $p < 0.05$.

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Also, the research also reviewed the link between social activism and activism in civil society and social distance. In these terms, outcomes are less clearer, thereby suggesting that social activism or activism in civil society not necessarily influences the narrowing of the social gap. Outcomes are discussed in due account of permanent efforts to involve minorities in governance and public life in Kosovo.

Keywords: *social distance, demographic characteristics, social/political activism, prejudices*

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Introduction

The concept of social distance, framed as a theoretical construct and tested by Bogardus (1925, 1926), refers to the scale of understanding and intimacy, which generally characterizes parasocial and social relations. The source of the initial conceptions of the field is based on sociological studies on the stances in the early past century (Bichi, 2008). Bogardus (1947) states that studies on social distance are concentrated on emotional reactions of persons against other persons or other groups. A wider formulation of social distance (Cesareo, 2007) sees it as the lack of availability and relations in being open – in various intensities – of an entity in relation to others, perceived and viewed as different based on their involvement in a social category. It is the result of a dynamic interaction with factors found in three different dimensions of space, their own selves in a reciprocal co-production: physical, symbolical and geometric.

Studies have shown a link between social distance and prejudice. Moon, Lee, Park, Lee, Kim, Kim and Shin (2008) have proven strong linkages between

social distance and prejudice, which together develop a model of formation of discrimination. According to Marger (2009), prejudice does not only include simply mental perceptions of an ethnic group (cognitive dimension of prejudice), but also emotions and readiness to act in a certain manner against members of such groups (affective and co-native dimensions). Affective and co-native dimensions of prejudice are reflections of social distance. Studies of the Bogardus team have suggested also that social distance has emotional qualities (Morgan, 2008).

Nix (1993) has studied the existence of social distance and factors affecting its extension amongst university students. Results have shown that the social distance is a function of the ethnic background, relevant education level and earlier interaction with other ethnic groups. In another study (Dyer, Vedlitz and Worchel, 1986), it was found that the level of social distance is reduced with the increasing education.

When one talks about the linkage between social distance and social/political activism, studies have shown that social activism is related to collective efficiency, which in turn is related to the concept of identity and collective action (Oskamp, 2000). Also, war and conflict have been proven to increase the level of social distance, especially against minorities (Siber, 1997).

In this study, social distance is defined as distance shown towards a certain group of people/individual, or lack of desire to have them as neighbors. Based on a literature review, the scholars have assumed that:

1. Persons with a higher education level would report lower levels of social distance in comparison with persons with a lower level of education.
2. Ethnicity, gender and settlement shall not influence the points of social distance.
3. Persons that have travelled to the EU states shall have lower scores in social distance in comparison to those not having travelled there.

The study concentrates on an analysis of data on social distance in relation to demographic factors, using the records from a study made by the Kosovo Foundation for Civil Society. Such a study was aimed at measuring perception of the population on civil society and analyze the activism of citizens in civic initiatives. The organization gave its consent for using the data for the present study.

Method

Participants

The study is based on interviews with 1296 respondents, from which 834 (64.4%) were Albanians, 180 (13.9%) Serbs, 90 (6.9%) Turks, 65 (5 %) RAE, 90 (6.9%) Bosnians, 35 (2.7%) others and 2 (.2%) foreign citizens living in Kosovo. By gender, the respondents were divided into 46.3% male, and 54.4% female.

The age of respondents was from 18 to 83, at an average of 37.75 years. In terms of settlement, 46.5% of respondents were living in rural areas, and 53.5% in urban areas.

The sample was developed by using the multi-stage probability sampling method. This method was used for three population sub-groups, Kosovo Albanian, Kosovo Serb, and other minorities, Bosnian, Turkish, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Gorani, etc.

Procedure

Respondents were interviewed within a period of three weeks throughout Kosovo. This study used only some of the data from the questionnaire used for the research undertaken by the Kosovo Foundation for Civil Society, aimed at developing a civil society Index. As a dependant variable, social distance was measured with 9 questions, whether the respondent would wish to have as neighbors people like unmarried, persons belonging to another ethnicity or religion, homosexuals, people consuming alcohol, etc. Records from this variable were analyzed by checking the settlement, ethnicity of respondent, prior travels to EU states, level of education, and gender of respondent. Data analyses were undertaken with the use of the program SPSS 17.00.

Results

The average comparison test (t-test) was used to compare social distance between men and women. The test resulted in a significant difference in the average social distance between women (M=3.87, DS=2.36) and men (M=3.62, DS=1.97); [t(1,1140)=-1.97, p=0.049].

The same analysis was made separately for ethnicities, resulting into significant gender differences in averages of high scores for social distance amidst women in Albanians and Turks. Other ethnicities have not marked any significant gender difference in social distance.

One reason for explicating gender differences may be that the Serbian women have reported university education in 31.2% of the cases, in comparison with Albanian women in 23.1%, or Bosnian in 5.1%.

Table 1
Difference in social distance, by gender in ethnicity

	Gender			
	Women	Men	T	Df
Albanian	4.1 (2.04)	3.77 (2.1)	**-2.02 ***	798
Serb	3.54 (3.9)	3.27 (1.72)	-.568	168

Turk	3.18 (1.57)	2.00 (1.66)	**-2.37 ***	51
RAE	2.00 (1.87)	2.43 (1.87)	.640	23
Bosnian	3.47 (1.30)	3.59 (1.09)	.367	54

Note: *= p<=.05, ***=p<=.01. Standard deviation is in brackets under social distance averages.

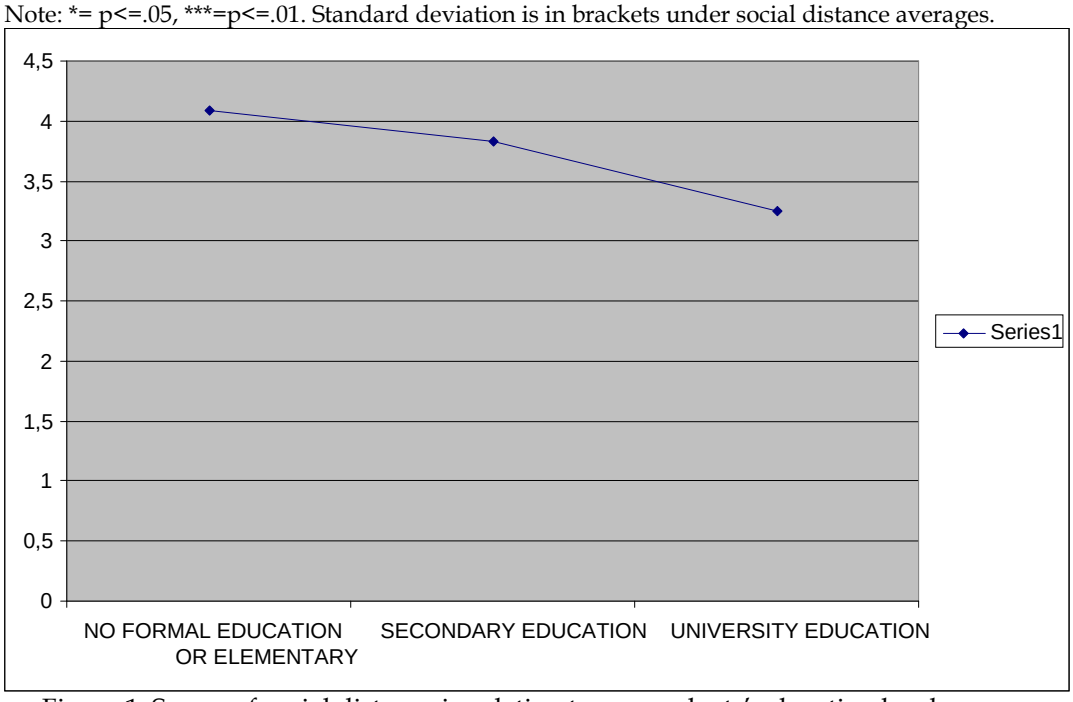

Figure 1. Scores of social distance in relation to respondents' education levels

One-way ANOVA was used as a test to mark the differences between three groups, based on education levels, in scores of social distance. Education of respondents was categorized into three categories: those lacking formal education and having elementary education, secondary education and university education. Social distance marks significant differences between the three groups [F(2, 1141) = 10.96, p=0.001]. Turkey's analysis of comparison between groups gives indications that the lacking or elementary education group (M=4.09, 95% CI [3.83, 4.36]) has no significant differences with those completing secondary education (M=3.83, 95% CI [3.64, 4.08]), p=0.234. A comparison between university educated respondents (M=3.25, 95% CI [3.03, 3.46]) and the two other groups results into a significant difference of p=0.001.

The same analysis was made separately for ethnicities, and this difference was repeated only with Albanian respondents, and not with other ethnicities.

The correlation between years in education and scores in social distance has shown to be negative r=-0.113, p=0.001.

The correlation between the social distance index and civil society activism index (measured by participation or membership with various civil groups) has shown to not be that significant r=0.058, p=0.056). Also, social distance seems to not have any significant correlation with the belief or thought that civil society has had any positive influence on the environment they live in r=0.038, p=0.209).

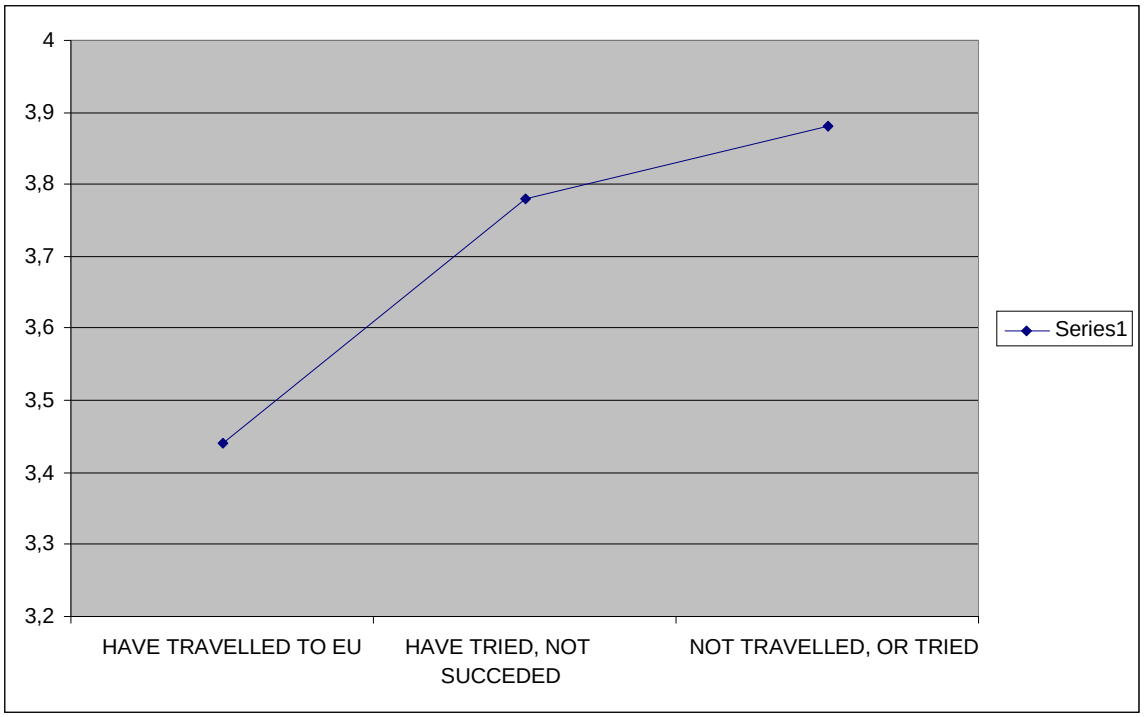

Figure 2. Scores of social distance in relation to travels of respondents to EU

The one-way ANOVA was used as a test to mark the differences between three groups: 1) those that have travelled to a EU state; 2) those who have tried, but have not succeeded in travelling; and 3) those who have not tried, and not travelled. Social distance has a significant difference between the three groups [F(2, 1136) = 4.45, p=0.012]. The Turkey Analysis of comparison between groups indicates that the group that has travelled to an EU state, (M=3.44, 95% CI [3.24, 3.64]) shows no significant difference from those that have tried, but have not succeeded in travelling to an EU state (M=3.78, 95% CI [3.45, 4.4.12]), p=0.402. The comparison of average social distance reported between respondents who have travelled to an EU state (M=3.25, 95% CI [3.03, 3.46])

with the group that has not travelled and not tried to travel to an EU state (M=3.89, 95%CI [3.70, 4.05] has shown significant differences with p=0.008.

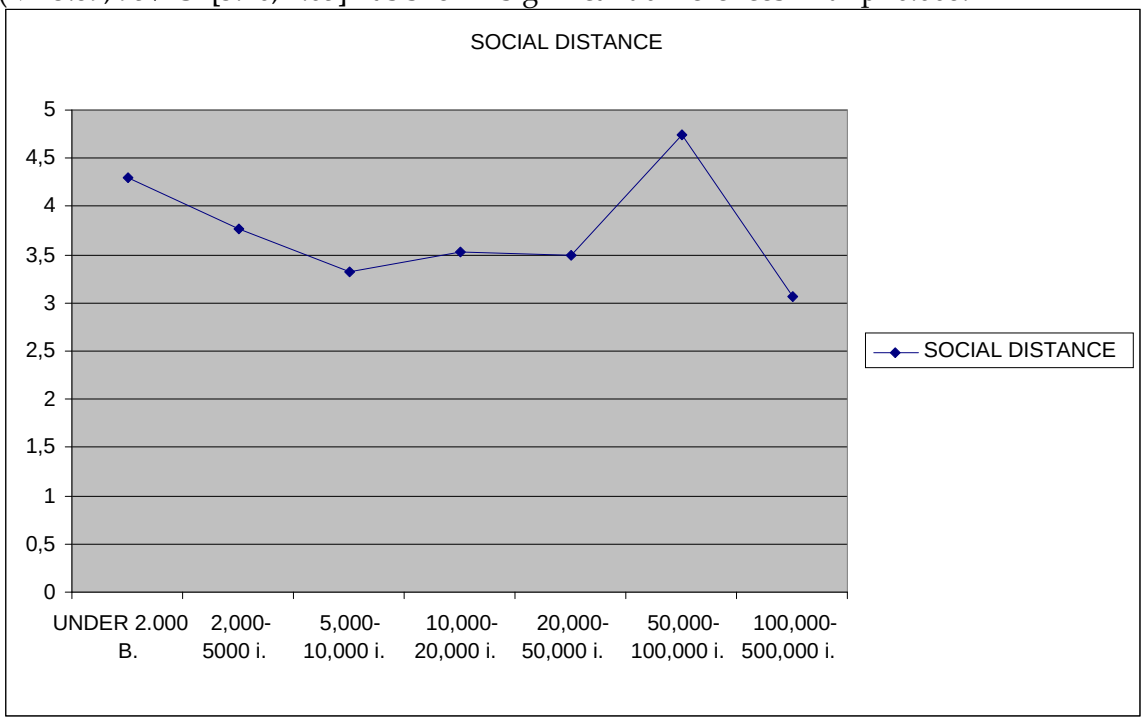

Figure 3. Scores in social distance in relation to the size of settlement of respondents

The one-way ANOVA was used as a test to mark the differences between respondents living in settlements of a certain size of population, and it showed that social distance differed in dependence of the population size [F(6, 1027) = 9.08, p=0.001].

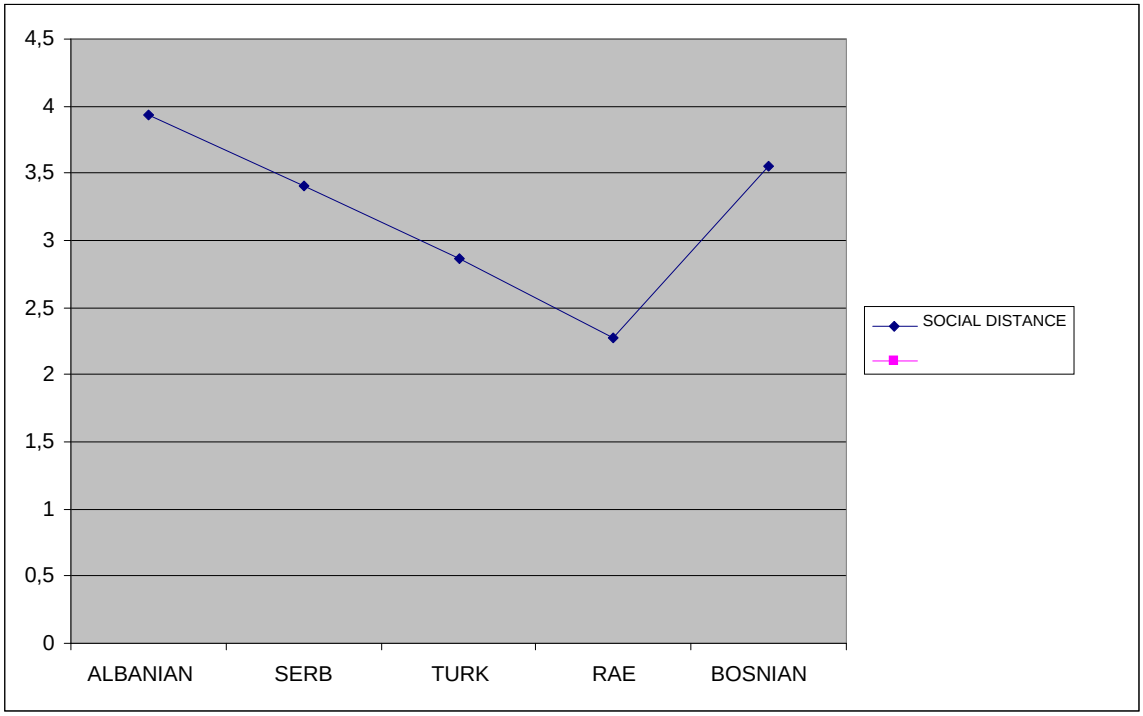

Figure 4. Scores of social distance in relation to respondents' ethnicity

The one-way ANOVA was used as a test to mark the differences between respondents of five ethnicities involved in the research. Social distance shows significant differences between the three groups F(4, 1110) = 7.56, p=.001. Turkey's analysis of comparison between ethnicities indicates that Albanians have a higher average social distance (M=3.94, 95% CI [3.79, 4.08] when compared with Serbs (M=3.41, 95% CI [2.94, 3.87]), with a significant difference of p=0.36, with Turks (M=2.86, 95% CI [2.4, 3.32]), with a significant difference of p=0. 005, and with RAE (M=2.28, 95% CI [1.61, 2.94]), with a significant difference of p=0.002. Albanians show no significant difference in social distance with the scores marked by Bosnians (M=3.55, 95% CI [3.24, 3.68]), p=0.707.

Additional analyses were made to see whether there are differences between various ethnicities in having as neighbors persons who speak another language. Results in figure 5 show that Albanian and Serb respondents report higher levels of lack of desire to have as neighbors' persons who speak a different language from their own. Differences in percentage are χ^2 (4, N = 1130) = 39.13, p = .01.

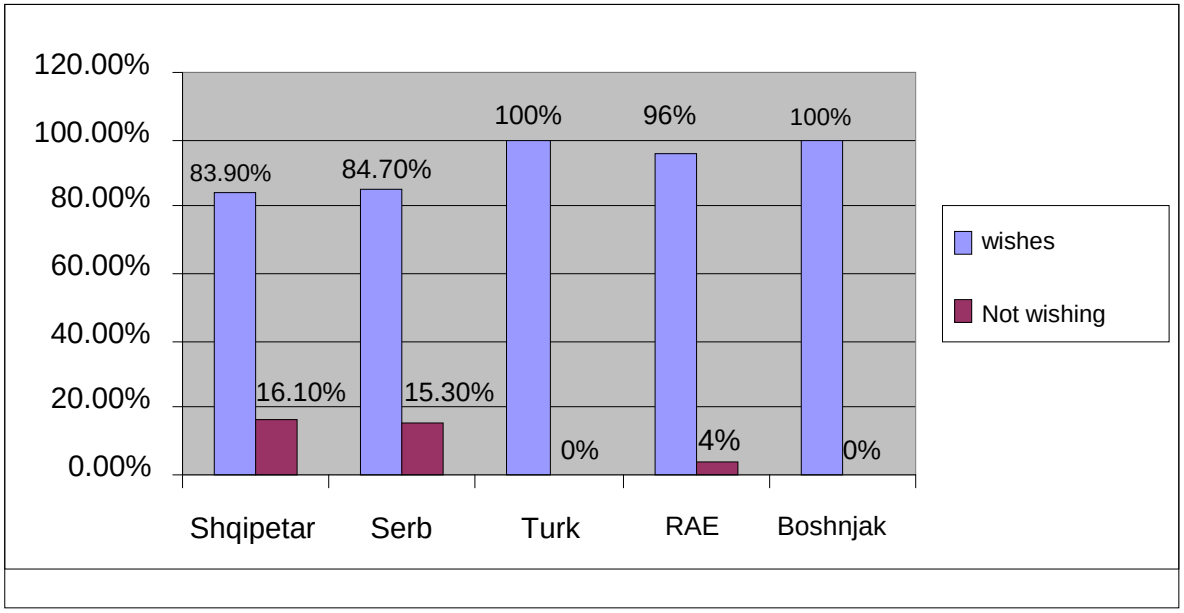

Figure 5. Desire to have for neighbor someone who speaks another language

Additional analyses have given significant differences between Albanians and Serbs only in having as neighbors members of the RAE communities (see figure 6). Albanians have reported higher levels of the desire, that they would mind having RAE community members for neighbors, in comparison with Serbs. The chi-squared test has resulted in a significant difference χ^2 (2, N = 999) = 13.97, p = .02.

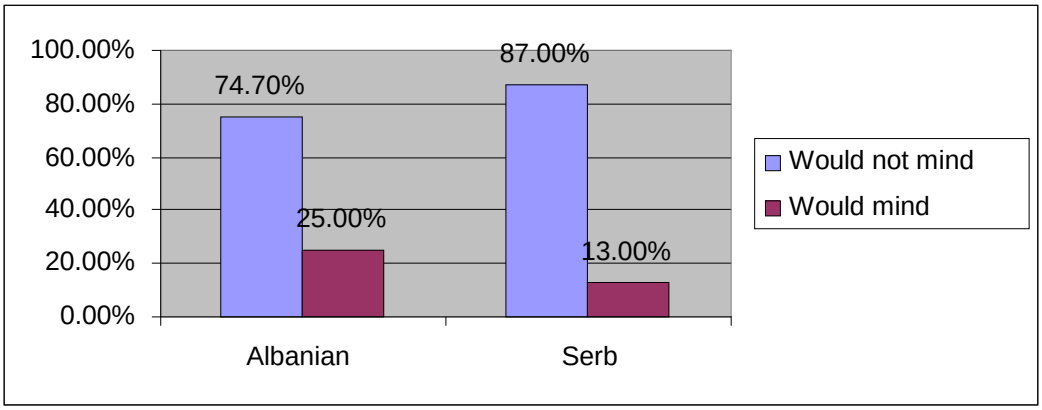

Figure 6. Scores of social distance on having RAE community members for neighbors

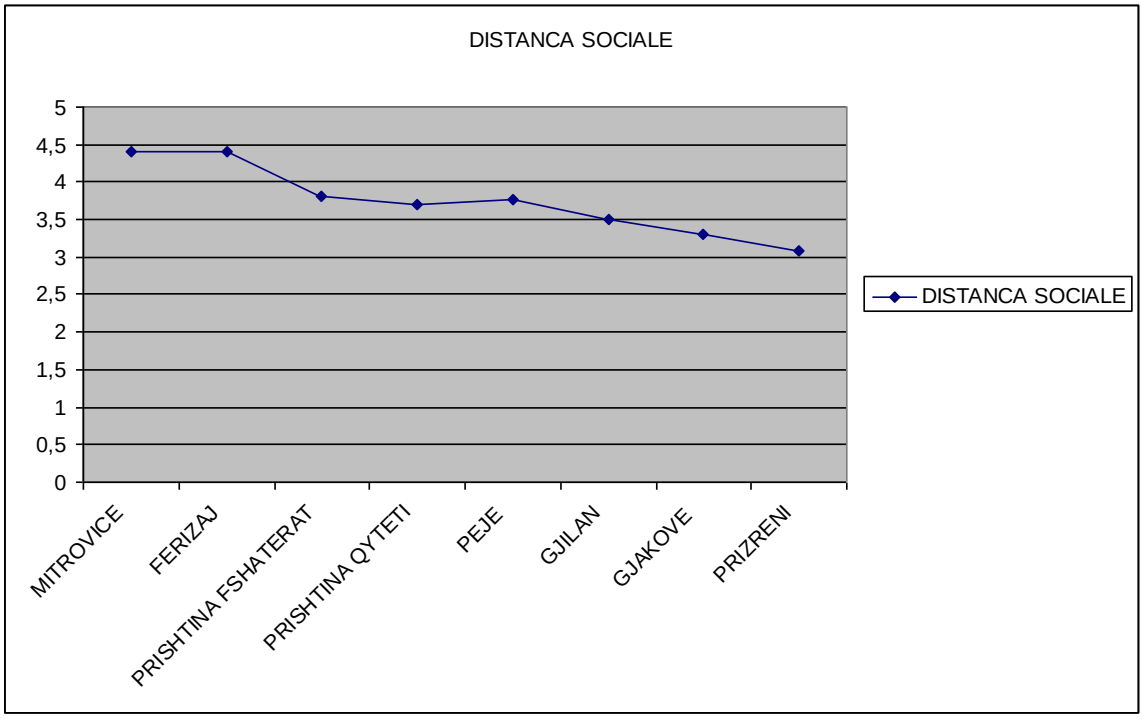

Figure 7. Scores of social distance related to respondents' settlements

The one-way ANOVA was used as a test to view differences between regions of origin of respondents, which has resulted into the fact that social distance differs in origins of respondents [F (7, 1060) = 8.22, p=0.001].

Discussion

Results seem to prove some of the hypothesis of research, while quashing several others. The hypothesis that persons with higher education shall report lower levels of social distance in comparison with those with a lower education has been proven. The hypothesis that "ethnicity, gender and settlement shall have no influence in social distance scores" has not been proven, because research has shown that in Kosovo, several ethnic groups have higher levels of social distance, and women show higher levels of social distance in comparison with men, while results from settlements have shown mixed outcomes. The hypothesis that "persons travelling in EU countries shall score lower in social distance in comparison with those that have not travelled to the EU" has been proven.

In accordance with literature and earlier research on social distance and education (Dyer, Vedlitz and Worchel, 1986), research outcomes have shown a negative ratio between education and social distance, meaning that with

increasing number of years passed in education, social distance diminishes. This is also in accordance with findings of other research, which have shown that education has a negative correlation with social distance and stigma against persons with mental problems (Link, Phelan, Bresnahan, Stueve, and Pescosolido, 1999), or persons with special needs (Tringo, 1970). It is worth mentioning that the largest difference between various groups in education terms seems to be found between those with university education, in comparison with other education levels. The failure in finding differences in social distance between the group with no formal education and primary education, and secondary education, may be due to the small number of respondents without any formal education; on the other hand, the lack of significant differences in social distance between primary and secondary educated respondents is a matter requiring further research.

The hypothesis that "ethnicity, gender and settlement shall not have any influence in scores of social distance" has not been fully validated. Research shows that in Kosovo, Albanians, Serbs and Bosnians have higher levels of social distance, when compared with Turks and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian. Viewed from the history of political problems in Kosovo, it is understandable that Albanians and Serbs report a higher degree of social distance against other groups, and the same is valid for Bosnians, who may have developed social distance from the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But also, the analysis of settlements of these groups in Kosovo shows that these three ethnic groups are more divided in ethnic bases from other groups. On the other hand, social distance in other groups (Turks, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian) is smaller, since these groups live surrounded by other ethnic groups, or together with them, which make them more interactive and open to other ethnic and social groups. This result supports the conclusions by Nix (1993), that interaction influences social distance. The lowest score of social distance was marked in the group of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian respondents. Apart from the explanation on interaction given above, it may also be concluded that the position of these groups in Kosovo society is more marginalized and prejudiced (UNDP, 2011; UNDP 2004). In the future, research in the field must concentrate in measuring distance between non-ethnic and non-cultural groups, such as for example, persons with special needs, persons with mental problems, and similar groups.

In contradiction to the hypothesis, according to research results, women show higher levels of social distance when compared with men. Independently of expectations that there would not be any differences between men and women in terms of social distance, outcomes have shown larger differences between men and women in this sense. These results do not match with earlier research undertaken in European countries (Corrigan, Edwards, Green, Diwan, and Penn, 2001), but may be explicated by other variables. The most evident

variable, which was also measured in this research, the education, where the average education in female respondents was lower in comparison with the males. Considering the relation between education and social distance, one can hypothesize that gender differences in the study may be influenced by differences in education. The findings of this research are in compliance with findings of other studies on gender differences in education. For example, according to the UNDP (2012), men in Kosovo have proportionally two years of education more than the women. As a consequence of gender differences in education, Kosovo women have lower participation in the labour market (SOK, 2010) and in other social activities, in comparison with the men, and that makes them less interactive with other social groups, which may have in turn affected the outcomes of this research.

The hypothesis that there shall not be any differences in terms of settlements has not been validated, since according to the outcomes, social distance may vary by settlement. Looking at sizes of settlements, social distance is higher in smaller settlements, and shrinks with the increasing size of settlement. Nevertheless, in a general negative trend between size of settlement and social distance, settlements of population between 50,000 and 100,000 seem to be settlements of larger social distance (see figure 3). General trends in terms of settlements and social distance may be explicated by referring to interaction and education, where it is assumed that larger towns have more diverse groups, and living in cities implies interaction with various social groups, which causes a decline in social distance. It may also be safe to assume that in larger settlements, there are more people of higher education, which also influences social distance.

On the other hand, outcomes on settlements have given mixed results. High social distance for settlements of sizes 50,000 - 100,000 may have been influenced by the city of Mitrovica, which had the highest social distance in comparison with other settlements (see figure 5). The political situation of an ethnic division in the city, which has persisted since 1999, and contradictory views on the resolution of the situation, may have influenced these outcomes.

Ultimately, the hypothesis that "citizens that have visited EU countries shall have less social distance when compared with those not visiting" has partially been validated, since the differences have been significant between those that have visited the EU, and those that have not visited, nor tried to visit the EU; meanwhile, there were no differences between those who have visited the EU, and those applying for visas and being rejected. Explanations for such findings are hypothetical, and may derive from the views of influential family members that may be in diaspora, since those applying for visas usually have a member of their family living abroad. To say more about cultural influence brought by the family members living in European countries to the reduction of social

distance, one would need further research with such population groups, and further a comparison with the general population.

Generally, the findings of this research validate the importance of education and interaction with various groups in reducing social distance. The fact that the social activism does not have a negative correlation with social distance is rather contradictory, since it is thought that activism is usually in protecting human rights, which makes activists more open to other ethnic and social groups. In Kosovo's case, the history of war, and opposite stances of the two important ethnic groups (Albanian and Serb) in the northern part of Kosovo, may have influenced the outcomes. Being that the social and political activists are those who can be engaged in realizing rights of their own ethnic group, they may have become more exclusive against other social and ethnic groups.

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