MIXED APPROACH TO MEASURING SOCIAL DISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

The concept of social distance belongs to a sociological tradition starting back from Simmel, who identified the generative factors for specific society forms just in the distancing processes. In North-American sociology, the Chicago tradition and, specifically, the work of Bogardus, represent an important conceptual premise, but, moreover, the first methodological reference. Starting from the work of Bogardus, during XIX century, various measures of social distance have been elaborated, tested and used in social research. This article describes the operationalization process for the concept of social distance in an Italian research and the construction of a perceived social distance scale (pSD). The process of scale development is described

KEYWORDS: social distance, social space, attitude measurement.

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A RESEARCH ON SOCIAL DISTANCE

The study of attitudes in sociological thought is rooted in the famous research of William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918-1920), where the concept gets used for the first time in a systematic and extensive manner. Since the end of World War I the concept - indicating the relationship between an individual and a socially significant object – begins to gain a wide use, in social sciences too, giving rise to a large number of contributions, out of which the works of Thurstone and Chave (1929) and Bogardus (1925) stand out. It is Emory Bogardus himself that introduced the concept of social distance to sociological thought, on which the present research focuses.

The methodological research on social distance (SD) draws its roots from a project of collaboration between various Italian universities that worked for the study of this phenomenon in seven large urban areas. It started from a common theoretical basis and it was developed into a program, aimed at building instruments that could measure the concepts proposed in the initial conceptual scheme. This research – that resulted in the publication of six volumes where its achievements and many dimensions are presented and analyzed – also inspired the present article, which synthesizes the reflections carried out for the empirical transformation of the concept of SD, using a mixed approach to social research.

The initial technical framework is illustrated in detail in the volume entitled *Social Distance. A Research in the Italian Urban Areas* (Cesareo, 2007), that shows, how it is possible to identify instruments for analysis that are still indispensable to the comprehension of social life, even within the most consolidated conceptual set of social sciences. This is one of the points on which the entire research process is based: the idea that sociological tradition can still provide the basis for reading phenomena that are currently be perceived by the sociological eye. However, if society changes – and sociology knows how fast and profoundly it has happened and is happening in the last decades – then both the

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1 For an outline of these studies, see Edwards (1957), Torgeson (1958). To offer an idea on the many meanings that were attributed to the concept of attitude in those years, deFleur and Westy (1963) mention an article by Nelson (1939) which examines research that has been conducted in that period on this topic. Nelson retrieves not less than twenty-three diverse meanings, as for example: intent, motivation, emotional component of the action, permanent disposition of feeling, generalized conduct, verbal response pro or against an object, socially determined response, determinant of the direction of an activity, result of experience organizing, overall sum of tendencies, ways of feeling, desires, fears, prejudice and convictions regarding an object. Thus, the meanings varied from the simple definition of Bogardus (1925) that sees the attitude as a tendency towards action, to the most complex definition, the last in the list above, that belongs to Thurstone. See, among others, LaPiere (1934), Likert (1942), Guttman (1944), deFleur – Catton (1957).

2 The project, cofinanced by the Italian Ministry of University, has been conducted by research teams from the Universities of Genova, Milano Cattolica, Roma La Sapienza, Napoli Federico II, Napoli Suor Orsola Benincasa, Bari, Calabria, Palermo.
conceptual relationships and the instruments used to understand and explain it must adapt to the change. This means, in the context of this research, that SD has to be found an adequate definition and that its measurement techniques and instruments have to be updated accordingly.

**From concept definition to its modeling**

The concept of *social distance* is part of the sociological tradition starting with Simmel (1908) who, in his formal sociology, identifies the distancing processes with the generative factors for the various societal forms. In North American sociology, the tradition of Chicago School and, specifically, the work of Bogardus (1925), as already mentioned, represent important conceptual antecedents, and, above all, the first methodological references for the topic. The work of Bogardus set-off the construction, testing and use of various measures of social distance and thus concept definitions were elaborated in respect to the specific objects of analysis. This observation indicates, in itself, the polysemy of the expression and its multi-dimensionality, but also its fertility as a conceptual instrument for reading a plurality of phenomena.

From this vast panoramic of theoretical and methodological references and from the parallel epistemological reflection, which calls for a redefinition of the conceptual and categorical set of social sciences, we can draw two indispensable reflections, in order to direct the process of empirical transformation of the SD concept. First of all, there is the necessity to adapt the concept to the present social reality, and successively, to separate the possible spheres that are semantically associated to it, and once identified, to take them into consideration in a disjunctive manner.

The definition of SD that we propose and implement in our research is the following: *social distance is the lack of availability and relational openness – of variable intensity – of a subject in regard to others perceived and acknowledged as different on the basis of their inclusion in a social category. It is the result of the dynamic interaction of factors situated on three different dimensions of space, themselves in a reciprocal co-production: physical, symbolic and geometrical* (Cesareo, 2007: 11)

A first reading of the definition can indicate that the meaning ascribed to the concept refers specifically to one of the classical, dichotomizing, analytical subdivisions of the concept – objective SD/subjective SD – and in particular to one of the two categories, the *subjective SD* (sSD), that refers to the lack of relational openness of a single subject in regard to socially defined others. Moreover, this distinction between *objective* social distance and *subjective* social distance also emerged from the participants during semi-structured interviews we carried out as a qualitative phase of the research, that will be further detailed:

“Maybe I can diminish the distance on one aspect, and feel closer to the guy. But maybe the distance practically increases on other aspects...it’s one
thing to talk about how close you feel to another person, and it’s another thing if we look at how close or distant two persons really are, it depends on the perspective from which you look at persons...I mean, if you are interested in the subjective or in the objective distance” (MI – FL)

Thus it is useful to elaborate, even synthetically, on the relationship between the two meanings of the term that the definition suggests. The direct relationship between objective SD (oSD) and the concept of social stratification appears obvious, where by the latter we refer to the set of hierarchically ordered positions inside social groups, constituted on the basis of economical and social capital, in terms of power and prestige. It can be asserted, in other words, that social stratification could function as an operational definition of oSD. To further visualize this idea, it can be seen as a vertical dimension of SD, in line with a spatial metaphor that we will discuss, and that permeates the entire research process. In the definition of SD that we proposed earlier, if we think in these terms, it is not explicitly expressed, but it is implicitly assumed by what we identified as physical, symbolic and geometrical factors. Thus, oSD is conceptualized as a concurring dimension both to the knowledge that society socializes its members to and to the physical organization of the space in which their relationships take place. The positioning factors are thus understood as co-determinants of both objective differences and subjective attitudes that originate distancing processes, thus arriving back to the reflections of Simmel (1908), who attributed a fundamental value and function in the construction of society itself to SD.

This line of reasoning can also be applied to sSD, whose illustration, using the spatial metaphor (see Figure 1), results orthogonal in respect to oSD, thus delineating a horizontal dimension, in which relationships co-determine both the objective differences and the subjective attitudes that originate distancing processes. While keeping in mind that there is an un-ignorable reciprocal penetration of the two dimensions of SD – vertical and horizontal, we do need to analytically separate them in order to proceed to their potential operational definition. We can easily consider that oSD is operationally definable as social stratification, and the existing literature offers extensive and articulate solutions for its operationalization, conceived and tested in decades of studies and research. The research that gave birth to this study acquires these instruments and uses them, concentrating the methodological study on the concept of sSD, that needs reflection work and, consequently, construction of instruments for its measurement, to a greater degree, up to now.

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3 Between brackets we indicated: the initials of the city of residence of the interviewee (MI=Milano, BA=Bari), its gender (F/M) and the category they have been assigned to, where L stands for lower and U stands for upper, categories that, as will be further discussed, defined the population groups involved in the research.

4 For a detailed account of this literature and of the instruments used in this research, see Palumbo e Poli 2007; Poli 2007

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In the process of empirical translation of meaning of the concept, it is necessary to operate a further subdivision in dimensions, of decreasing complexity compared to the basic concept, identified as sSD. As already pointed out, one of the categories that are of greater relevance for this demarche is connected to space. The hypothesis is that the conceptualization of sSD cannot abstract from its spatial implications: physical, symbolical and geometrical, and that the space and its organization are, ab origine, products of the system of values and categories in which culture and knowledge get produced socially. At the same time, we hypothesize that the spatial reifications, derived from this weltanschauung, constitute a “geometrical frame” and the patterns that regulate the interactions between groups and subjects, and that therefore constitute the structural preconditions of the social production of knowledge (LoVerde & Introini, 2007).

On the other hand, this hypothesis regarding space gets corroborated with the accounts of the social actors that participated in the research. The accounts reveal the centrality of this aspect for the subjective perception of social distance. Some excerpts from these interviews are particularly meaningful in this direction, as they point out the two main ecological forms of social distance, based on the organization of space: one that regards the processes by which social distance gets built (the first two excerpts below) and one that regards the strategies by which this distance gets reduced (the third and fourth excerpts):

“In the city in general I see really different situations, because young people naturally have different ways, for example my son would never even dream of going to play soccer in the pitches for boys of average or low class…almost naturally young people divide their territory and the places a bit, and keep distance reciprocally, the ones from the others…then there are some aggregation spots, like Saturday evening in Ferrarese Square, where they are all together and you cannot observe any distance, if not the one they can put themselves, normally, by not communicating, but for the rest, they do tend to frequent different places.” (BA – FU)
“There are some coffees in Sonnino Street or in Madonnella Square that function as attraction spots for the bit lower categories, but this never takes place in a conflictual manner. Every person uses specific places or pubs as a place for personal use and consumption and ignores what others do; here, nearby, there are two other places, a patisserie and a bar with patisserie, but they have two different types of clients that ignore each other”. (BA – MU).

“The parish priest from the Church S. Giuseppe is, in the neighborhood, the one who takes care of reducing distances between persons, and he does it by organizing shows, dances, fireworks, all in all moments of sharing...and there are people of all kinds there...thus it is a bit my idea too, if you offer places for gathering, the fusion gets created. All in all, for me it’s a question of spaces and places [...] basically it’s the absence of places that creates a distance”. (BA – FU)

“If there had been some place for these persons to gather and stay safely, it would have been different. [...] For example in the parish there is a very good priest, that puts seats outside and makes shows, and there I think the distance between these categories reduces, because they see each other, they stay together. Then, in the area, unfortunately there aren’t any similar places, but at Japiglia there is a communal club where pensioners, of any category, entertain themselves, there is the pensioner, the commander, the railway personnel in pension, but the dustman too. It is a club for pensioners, but if these places do not exist, it is logical that if they don’t meet they will always be distant”. (BA – ML)

The organization and use of urban space mark social distance and thus become its indicators, because they succeed in pointing out its modalities, negatively or positively valued, in a pragmatic perspective on distance, capable in this way not only to be intentionally acted, thus constructed, but also reduced by practices adapted to this goal. These positions clearly point out a consequent problematic aspect, that will not be discussed here, that refers to the sign of the social distance. In this sense, it can be thought of first as the contrary of closeness, including the specific semantic marks of proximity, or, secondly, it can be investigated as a size as such. Without wanting to leave out the inevitable implication of the value dimension of the actor, the methodological choice that guided this research focuses on the second option, thus limiting the SD measurement to the aspects directly connected to distance perceptions and practices, not to closeness perceptions and practices, as it will be even more obvious in the following.

Space has entered the context of the research in various ways. The first and most important regards the definition of the intended target population for the survey. By doing that, we could not only define the sample to be interviewed, but, start the process of operational definition in itself. We could have chosen to investigate on the general population, and thus obtain a sample that is not
differentiated. But it soon became clear that the theoretical basis that we chose to start from, in which the metropolis and the use of space were prominent, needed an initial choice that would shed light, as completely as possible, on the differences that derive from organized space, and thus reasoned choices on the basis of the hypothesis initially stated.

Accepting the idea that the space of the city is already a meaningful space, the physical mirroring of an organization of distance, meant a consideration of the social dimension and of its relevance to the explanation of how cities construct their space. It is thus reasonable, if we start from the modern model of a city, to think of urban space as a geographical map that mirrors that of the distinction between classes and categories. This is where the research question departs from, assumes the presence of a reified organization that explains one of the dimensions of oSD, and wants to investigate its presence and weight in the subjective construction of social distance, that of persons willingly constructing and modeling social reality. The present research intended to investigate collectives defined in this particular manner, in order to measure the dimensions of sSD starting from a differentiation that can be operatively identified with the appropriation of space, itself directly related to status, in its most extended meaning, that is of a multidimensional set of social resources, possible overall indicator of oSD.

In order to establish the target population for the research, we needed to define the properties of the research object and, underlining the ecological dimension of the problem for the above reasons, we chose to identify the study populations with their neighborhoods of residence, seen as reifications of objective distance. In other words, urban space organized socially was considered to summarize, in its differentiations, the possible states of oSD, and thus we considered that this subdivision can operationally indicate the values on the vertical dimension of social distance. It then seemed possible, starting with this premise, to distinguish the dimensions of sSD, conceived as generating and generated by the more general processes of social distance.

If space, and its metaphors, generate and are generated by social distance – and if it is then possible to hypothesize the presence of an “objective” and a “subjective” component of social distance – we can also logically deduct their “non-difference”, their potential definition as intentional social activities, identified as distancing processes. We can thus identify at least three modalities of the construction/reproduction process of sSD: a perceived social distance (pSD), distinct, recognized as such by who experiences it; an expressed social distance (eSD), intentionally put in practice as an action of distancing oneself; an undergone social distance (uSD), the result of the distancing action (see Figure 2).
The elaboration of operational definitions for these dimensions is not simple, nor unambiguous. In sociology there is a massive production of instruments aimed at measuring various aspects of social distance. The most relevant demarche for the operationalization of SD is, up to now, the scale of Bogardus, elaborated in its first form in 1925, focused on a specific aspect that can express SD from a phenomenological point of view. Starting from this theoretical framework, the Italian research team has performed the necessary steps for the construction of the instruments adapted to the measurement of the three identified dimensions: pSD, eSD and uSD.

**From the model to the operational definition**

In order to proceed to the identification of the operational definition of the semantically complex concept of Social Distance, the methodological laboratory applied distinct research actions, using a mixed approach that combines standardized and non-standardized techniques. The phases were the following:

1. **desk phase**: collection, examination and analysis of researches in sociological literature on the topic of social distance; collection, examination and analysis of methodological literature on the construction of question batteries or scales for the measurement of the concept in various disciplines;
2. the phase of *population definition*, on the basis of the theoretical coordinates that emerged from the construction of the initial theoretical framework and from the first step of the methodological demarche;

3. the phase of *definition of the instruments* for the measurement of expressed and undergone social distance, based on the work of Hess (2003);

4. the *qualitative* phase: gathering semi-structured interviews (Bichi, 2007) aimed at identifying the definition of social distance given by the target population, thus finalized with the identification of the relevant categories for the measurement of the perceived social distance, from an *emic* perspective;

5. the *test* phase for the standardized instrument for perceived social distance;

6. the phase of *redefinition* of the sample for the *survey*;

7. the *pretest* of the questionnaire.

Specifically, on the topic of the sample design, it is necessary to mention that we have identified, for the fourth step, two types of urban territory, named synthetically in this context *upper* and *lower*, classification that recalls, in name only, that of Warner, Eells, and Meeker (1949) The distinction is based on the type of residence and on the characteristics of the urban areas, considering that the neighborhoods that have prices above average on the real estate market and in which live, as hypothesized, mainly average-high classes – without being exclusive, and thus destined for a restricted elite – are *uppers*, while neighborhoods of public housing, so-called “popular”, in which houses are priced inferior to the average and where we hypothesize live predominantly persons of average-low status – without presenting a particular deterioration or population facing extreme hardships – are *lower*.

This “objective” distance – correlated, in basis of our conceptions and context, to the place of residence and thus also to properties like income and studies – operated thus as a discriminative dimension for the two types of population that we wanted to investigate on. The first step was the study of the territory of each city involved (Genova, Milano, Roma, Napoli, Bari, Reggio Calabria-Messina, Palermo), aimed at identifying the areas that could best fit the definition criteria for *upper* and *lower*, the results being presented in the book already quoted, edited by L. Frudà (2007).

The population, defined in this manner, was the focus of the qualitative phase and of the test phase (the fourth and fifth phases) that were aimed at identifying the categories necessary for the construction of the perceived social distance measurement instrument. The semi-structured interviews allowed us to collect a *conceptual glossary* of pSD, as expressed by persons interviewed. The purpose was to focus the eventual instrument on the terms used by the same population, and not by the theoretical *desk* examination.

This *glossary*, built by applying hermeneutical analysis on the interviews, comprised 90 different expressions and undergone, in phase 5, a test that allowed...
us to select the 15 items that built altogether the pSD scale, and were then inserted in the survey questionnaire (phase 7).

The other two measurements of SD, the one related to eSD and to uSD, were taken from the work of Hess (2003), that built and tested a measurement scale for relational social distance (RDI, Relational Distance Index), equivalent to the definition of eSD proposed in this article. The original scale was partly redefined (besides being translated), for the necessary adaptation to the Italian context and was then reformulated for an adequate measurement of uSD.

The redefinition of the sample (phase 6) specified the boundaries of the sets of the population on which to focus attention in the survey phase. Besides the two types of areas that were identified in phase 2, we added two others, with different residential characteristics. We further hypothesized, starting from the initial hypothesis that organized urban space produces and is produced by social distance, that the residential segregation processes typical of neighborhoods with strong or exclusive presence of unique layers of population weighted strongly in the construction of the logics of action and thought related to the SD phenomenology. In order to corroborate this hypothesis we then chose to further differentiate territories, adding, for every urban area, a neighborhood of mixed residence, in which uppers and lowers live in close contact.

The sampling was then constructed in stages (see Figure 3), starting from direct observation in the selected neighborhoods on the basis of the knowledge we already had. In the first stage, we sampled streets, secondly the buildings and thirdly we proceeded to a systematical extraction of names from the local electoral lists.

Two more necessary clarifications: we chose to interview (in phases 4 and 5 too) persons aged 35 to 59, thus excluding young people and young adults, and also the elderly, in other words, the population that can be considered, at least statistically, in full activity. The second point regards the so-call mixed areas: in this case we proceeded to the identification of the buildings considered of upper or lower prevalence, on the basis of structural characteristics and their belonging to the category of public housing.
The perceived social distance scale (pSD): choice of objects

In this paragraph we present the part of our work that was aimed at the construction of a scale for the measurement of perceived social distance, defined as the subjective dimension of the concept that refers to identifying social categories that get to be seen as socially distant. PSD is certainly one of the subjective dimensions of SD, that we consider empirically relevant, thus offering an efficacious operative definition.

As already mentioned, the first and most important effort to operationalize the pSD concept was that of Bogardus (1925). His famous scale had the purpose of measuring the distance between social or ethnic groups by a series of indicators that measure levels of acceptability of various and gradual types of social relationships. It came out that the social dimension of the group prevailed, based on physical distance too, and relational distance seems to depend on it. Thought by Bogardus in a historical and social reality marked by ethnic conflicts, this scale addressed the affective component of the attitudes, seen as connected to the drive:

**Figure 3**
Stages sampling

*Urban area*

- **Selection of upper neighborhood**
  - Street selection
  - Building selection
  - Systematic random sample

- **Selection of lower neighborhood**
  - Street selection
  - Building selection
  - Systematic random sample

- **Selection of mixed neighborhood**
  - Street selection
  - Building selection
  - Systematic random sample

*Upper buildings selection* and *Lower buildings selection*
if the individual is willing to accept a higher social proximity with a specific group, the author asserted, then he will have an attitude that is more positive towards that group and vice versa. Social distance was positioned on a segment that anticipated the rules of the scale that would be built by Guttman.5

In order to construct a perceived social distance scale, adapted to the interpretive model proposed in this research and seeking to solve some problems related to the response format used by Bogardus, we needed to reconsider the “objects” on which to measure distance and the response modalities, therefore the “measurement unit” of distance itself.

In the historical and social context of Bogardus, the distance between ethnicities was one of the distinct and problematic characteristics of social life, which needed reflection urgently, because of its centrality. In the case of contemporary social life in Italy, and specifically that produced in big cities (Frudà, 2007) identifying the objects of distance, the categories that mark the differences, the elements that can be seen as indicators of social distance, is not simple nor immediate, and even less when seeking for only a prevalent one. Some of these difficulties are well-known to sociological thought. Certainly, for example, nationality is a category that is able to mark distance (and generate conflicts) today in Italy, just as for Bogardus in United States; the lifestyles, with its multiple declinations, among which, obviously, consumption; culture, thought of as the set of knowledge and beliefs on the world; and, still efficient, all the traditional status markers, like wealth, profession, education, taken here as indicators of objective social distance. But these are really the elements able to make operative the perceived social distance in contemporary Italian city? Are there any others that operate? And how do these get used, expressed, communicated by subjects?

Having already built the conceptual apparatus, the research team proceeded to gathering information by semi-structured interviewing, able to point out, by the answers given, not only to the elements on which to base the objects, but also to the verbal forms, the words that people used to express the distance they perceive.

This second goal has a specific methodological relevance. It is our belief that we need to adapt the categories of the researcher to those of the actors with whom he builds knowledge of the social world. The adaptation, if aimed at identifying primarily the semantic contents of the categories, cannot make less of the linguistic form in which categories get communicated. This is important in all research phases, and even more when it calls the actor to actively participate in the research process itself, right from the interrogation moment. We will further quote some important parts of these interviews, particularly useful for the identification and outline of important differentiation elements:

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5 Guttman’s scalogram – *Guttman scaling* or *scalogram analysis* (Guttman 1944) is a single-dimension attitude measurement scale and consists of a series of items whose contents are such as to allow the attribution of an increasing or decreasing value for every item, in respect to a particular attitude.
“I feel distant to the other part made by persons that do not work at all or that have humble jobs, but only for a matter of distance, let’s say of behaviors, of choices.” (BA – MU)

“Because you go to the same supermarket and you buy various things, one the fillet, the other the minced, and this can increase the perception of distance, for the fact that the spaces are common. I think that basically the economical conception of distance remains important.” (BA – MU)

“The street, the school, the church put all of us together, but these are all non-permanent areas, what only interfere up to a point in the relationship, but then every one goes at home and has its own language, relationships, friends.” (BA – MU)

“I do not go to their places, entertainments, circles, because I can’t find myself, they are too important persons. [...] I don’t go to these places with these persons, that in the end I consider as very distant, for their way of thinking and of doing.” (BA – ML)

“I feel distant to my colleagues that record “Men and Women” by de Filippi in order to have something to talk about the day after in office. There, I feel them as distant, even if they have my own degree, more or less my age and so on. On the contrary, I feel very close, sometimes, to my head. She is 30, has a degree and a lot of money, but when we eat lunch together we talk about books or politics I feel closer to her than to my colleagues. But then, of course, it doesn’t always happen.” (MI – FL)

“I think that the things that put barriers between persons are money, school and work. Yes, have you ever seen a worker married to an actress? Or have you ever seen a lawyer marrying his cleaning lady? Maybe in films...but in real life, no...because they are too different, from too distant worlds.” (MI – FL)

“Social distance exists because people are different, they have different experiences, different life styles, they come from different families that transmit them different values, they live in different places...it is normal that if I grow up in Barona, go to school in Barona, maybe I stop going to school early because my parents keep telling me that they need money at home, I spend my time smoking outside, listening to the guys talking about soccer, I see my mother doing the housewife and it seems to be the only perspective, I get married, I make 4 kids, I stay at home and watch TV all day long...” (MI – FL)

“Us too, when we see one with the shirt and the tie we think he’s a professional and so we shouldn’t have much in common, so we are also responsible for causing this distance, I think.” (BA – ML)

Multiple types came out, subjects that are attributed types of practices, actions, experiences that actually seem to represent the distance perceived by the
interviewees. The acknowledgement of distance seems to pass through the attribution of phenomenal properties to individuals identified as distant by using classical structural characteristics (age, profession, gender, nationality etc), but even more frequently only the phenomenal properties are considered: “you see it in what one does, the places one goes to, the things one chooses to do, how to spend their spare time, the job one does...there are various ways that indicate social distance”, asserts one interviewee among many others.

The choice that was made on the basis of these emergent points was to propose as objects for measuring social distance those elements that came clearly out of the semi-structured interviews: not categories of persons associated by a professional position (the worker, the office worker, the manager, the professional, the housewife, etc), by a professional figure (the butcher, the garbage man, the president of the Republic, etc.), by a nationality (Chinese, Philippine, Mexican, Marrocan, etc.) or by any other traditional property that is commonly used to identify collectives, but “types” characterized by practices, behaviors, actions, lifestyles, cultural preferences.

The next step was then to build a long list of such types and have it evaluated by a test capable to select the elements inside this set that best distinguish the objects of perceived social distance for the two population groups that we had decided to investigate on: upper and lower.

The types tested

The elements that emerged from the qualitative phase were used to build 90 “types”, presented in Appendix 1, which can be summarized to four distinct spheres of sociality: cultural, social, economical, political. In these four conceptual categories, there are 31 items belonging to the cultural sphere (1-31), 29 to the social sphere (32-60), 18 to the economical sphere (61-78) and 12 to the political sphere (79-90). The items were chosen based on the expressive modalities of the interviewees (the closest possible to their linguistic expressions) and with attention to the balance between the items that refer to actions or conditions considered by the lower interviewees as distant, and the items that refer to actions or conditions perceived as socially distant by the uppers that we interviewed.

With regard to response modalities we chose to work with a modified version of the scale called self-anchored, a segment on which only extreme positions are identified by labels and thus semantically autonomous. In our case, the 0 point is not identified by any label while the 10 point is the only one that has it (“is very distant”) and it corresponds to maximum distance. All the other categories are numbers, with almost no semantic autonomy. This characteristic allows us to suppose that the numbers in the range or in the boxes along the segment are perceived as equidistant, and thus we can define the variables constructed in this manner as quasi-cardinals (Marradi, 2007). The reasons for this choice are derived from the goal of the measurement, focused only on distance (and not on a continuum closeness – distance as in the scale of Bogardus).
PARTICIPANTS

The choice of the subjects for the application of the test was done using a selection procedure by dimensions; we considered age ranges (35-49; 50-59)^6, social condition (identified with the area of residence), and gender. We interviewed a total of 224 persons, divided in two groups of equal numbers: 112 upper, out of which 56 aged between 39 and 49 and 56 aged between 50-59 and 112 lower, also divided in age groups.

PROCEDURE

We used 90 cards (each one containing one of the 90 previously chosen items for the testing), and a gadget, that is a cardboard big enough to contain the cards as they were positioned on the scale. The initial instructions offered to each interviewee were the following:

On every one of these cards there is a definition of a certain type of person. Please indicate how distant you feel socially from every one of these types, from 0 to 10 (maximum distance), placing every card in the position you consider most adequate.

The 90 items were presented while varying order for every subject, in order to avoid the potential bias caused by the presentation order of such a long series of items.

The analysis of scale’s items

The first operation that we applied to the data obtained from the application of the test was deflation (Marradi 1979-2007). Deflation is a procedure for the transformation of the scores obtained for every case by using a battery of questions applied with a self-anchoring or a graphic technique. It is analogue to the standardization that applies to variables, but deflation applies to cases^7.

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^6The choice of the population, for the entire research and for the testing phase, not only considered the neighborhood of residence in every city, but also the age of the subjects to select. Specifically, we chose to focus our research on the population aged 35 to 59, representing the population that is fully adult and still fully active.

^7 While standardization uses the mean and standard deviations of scores for all cases on one variable, deflation uses the mean and standard deviations of scores for every case taken separately, on all variables. The name “deflation” was chosen by Marradi because of the analogy with the procedure that economists use for the purification of single prices using the general level of the prices or other similar indices. The deflation procedure comprises two normalizations: the first transformation operation takes into account the tendency of every subject to attribute low or high scores. If, for every subject, we have enough
Practically, its purpose is to clean the data from the subjective tendency to privilege, in the responses, one or another segment of the scale, as for example by polarizing the responses to the extremes or preferring to assign high or average or low scores, and so on.

The data deflated in this manner was then analyzed in order to establish which ones of the 90 items that were used in the application were best capable to differentiate the positions of the interviewees, considered as two different groups: upper and lower. For this purpose we used two non-parametric tests for independent samples. The selection of items was established on two criteria: an acceptable number of items to insert in the final scale – that cannot be too long, as it could imply errors and biases for the application - and the presence, among the 15 items with a significant Z, of all the identified dimensions (cultural, social, economical, political), while maintaining a good balance between the “upper” and “lower” items, with the meaning specified above.

We need to specify that the item 56, “Who lives in a public housing building”, that has a Z= -6.475, was not inserted in the scale because the item 36 was already present, with a Z= -6.774, and semantically very similar: “Who lives in a public housing neighborhood”. The 15 selected items are presented in Table 1.

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8 The non-parametrical tests for two independent samples were used to determine if the values of a variable differ significantly between the two groups. The non-parametrical tests are used when the requirements for the parametrical tests, as the t-test, cannot be fulfilled. As this was the case for the distributions of the variables to test, we chose to use the Mann-Withney and Wilcoxon tests, useful for examining the null hypothesis that the two samples (1 and 2) come from the same population, without assuming the normality of the distributions.

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Table 1
The 15 items chosen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Who watches “The island of the famous”</td>
<td>6.543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Who watches the programs of M. de Filippi</td>
<td>7.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Who often speaks in dialect</td>
<td>6.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Who reads many books</td>
<td>6.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Who often goes to the theater</td>
<td>6.574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Who always speaks about soccer</td>
<td>6.217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Who spends many hours in front of the TV</td>
<td>6.413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Who lives in a public housing neighborhood</td>
<td>6.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Who is a worker</td>
<td>8.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52. Who is friend of a politician</td>
<td>6.376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57. Who often travels in airplane</td>
<td>7.211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59. Who has a house</td>
<td>8.415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71. Who is poor</td>
<td>6.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75. Who reads Sole 24ore</td>
<td>6.227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76. Who difficulty makes it till the end of the month</td>
<td>6.864</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

We can conclusively resume the steps taken in this study:
1. translation of the initial theoretical concepts into hypotheses that can be empirically investigated;
2. selection of one dimension proved to be relevant: the perceived social distance;
3. analysis of the instruments present the literature that are adequate for the measurement of this dimension, with increased attention for the Bogardus scale;
4. construction of an operational definition for perceived social distance, by:
   a. qualitative phase: exploration that lead to the identification of the potential objects;
   b. quantitative phase: the selection of the objects on which to measure distance, using a test on a sample from the population defined in the hypotheses;
   c. choice of the response format.

In what regards the hypotheses, we can resume them as following:
• possibility to distinguish various dimensions of social distance;
• possibility to identify, among these dimensions, an objective and a subjective social distance;
possibility to distinguish, as components of the subjective dimension, a perceived, an expressed and an undergone social distance;
• possibility to mirror the physical space with the symbolical space in modern cities;
• consequently, possibility to identify different populations in basis of the space they occupy, named here upper and lower.

Starting from these hypotheses we proceeded to scale construction for pSD, based on existing literature and, especially, on a qualitative study aimed at identifying, clearly and adequately from a terminological point of view, the objects on which to measure distance. We proceeded, with these results, to the selection of the objects that best distinguished between the two types of population, by applying a test on 224 subjects. We also chose to use a response format that could accurately identify attitude differences towards the selected objects.

The fifteen chosen items occupy a vast and complex semantic space that covers from the cultural to the economical sphere and from the social to the political one. The score distribution between groups was salient. Specifically, we can point out how some objects are mostly considered as being far from the upper and others as far from the lower, with salient differences between groups. The use of large-audience television, for example, marks a strong difference between the lower and the upper, the latter being decisively more distant from those that make frequent use of it. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize at least two aspects. The answers given by the subjects belonging to each group could have been influenced by many factors, and one of them is social desirability, which is a probable phenomenon when using fully standardized instruments, and that can be inflected in various ways, among which the resistance towards asserting positions opposed to the legitimate attitude, considered as such by the social reference group.

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Appendix 1

1. Who live together without being married
2. Who frequents the parish
3. Who sends his/her children to a private school
4. Who determines his/her children to obtain a degree
5. Who reads the newspaper “Il Giornale”
6. Who reads the newspaper “La Repubblica”
7. Who watches TG3
8. Who watches TG4
9. Who watches Big Brother
10. Who watches “The island of the famous”
11. Who watches the programs of M. de Filippi
12. Who watches the programs of Gad Lerner
13. Who listens to classical music
14. Who often speaks in dialect
15. Who often uses English words when speaking
16. Who reads many books
17. Who cannot use a computer
18. Who often goes to the theater
19. Who buys from stylist shops
20. Who buys clothes from market booths
21. Who goes to elegant restaurants
22. Who always goes to the gym
23. Who always speaks about soccer
24. Who plays golf
25. Who educates sons in the old fashion
26. Who always uses the car
27. Who reads a newspaper everyday
28. Who spends many hours in front of the TV
29. Who sends sons to study abroad
30. Who can speak good English
31. Who shops at the discount
32. Who lives in the same building as myself
33. Who lives in the same neighborhood as myself
34. Who owns a luxury house
35. Who lives in a luxury neighborhood
36. Who lives in a public housing neighborhood
37. Who lives in the city center
38. Who live in the suburbs
39. Who puts career first
40. Who is a foreigner
41. Who tries to work as little as possible
42. Who has a freelance job
43. Who has a stable job
44. Who works in television
45. Who manages power
46. Who decides for others too
47. Who is a worker
48. Who works in a bank
49. Who is the manager of a big company
50. Who has a master painting at home
51. Who does not pay ticket for public transportation
52. Who is friend of a politician
53. Who frequents famous persons
54. Who often eats at McDonald’s
55. Who has a driver
56. Who lives in a public housing building
57. Who often travels in airplane
58. Who goes to a private clinic to get cured
59. Who has a house
60. Who goes to the Seychelles in vacation
61. Who has more than one house
62. Who tries to make more money
63. Who settles for what he/she’s got
64. Who has a rich family
65. Who invests in the stock market
66. Who saves money
67. Who owns a boat
68. Who supplements his/her income working under the counter
69. Who buys by installments
70. Who pays with the credit card
71. Who is poor
72. Who is rich
73. Who is unemployed
74. Who works under the counter
75. Who reads “Sole 24ore”
76. Who difficultly makes it till the end of the month
77. Who doesn’t have money to go on vacation
78. Who has a brand new BMW
79. Who is a member in a political party
80. Who is politically involved
81. Who candidates for the elections
82. Who participates in protests
83. Who doesn’t vote
84. Who seeks help from a politician friend
85. Who works as a politician
86. Who has political opinions different from mine
87. Who always speaks about politics
88. Who trusts institutions
89. Who is not up to date with politics
90. Who watches political debates in TV