

Class Differences in Subjective Social Distance in the Czech Stratification System. Like-me or Prestige Effect?

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Background

Social Distances are „the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally“ (Park 1924: 339).

It describes the subjective feeling of individuals of a special proximity to each other. The feeling of common group affiliation and common identity indicates low, a distinct aloofness connected with diffuse fear high Social Distance. These feelings are not focused on particular individuals, but on categories (in terms of religiosity, class consciousness or ethnicity) (Steinbach 2004).

E. O. Laumann distinguishes **two forms of social distance** among different status positions in the **social stratification system**:

Subjective Social Distance is an “attitude of ego toward a person (alter) with a particular status attribute (such as occupation) that broadly defined the character of the interaction that ego would be willing to undertake with the attitude object” (Laumann 1966: 29).

Objective Social Distance is the “actually observed differential association of persons of different status attributes in various social relationships” (Laumann 1966: 30).

“In the following we will read out different professions. Please tell me for each of them, if you would like him or her as ...”

- (1) wife/husband, (min. social distance)
- (2) daughter-in-law/son-in-law,
- (3) close friend,
- (4) somebody who visits you often,
- (5) member in your sports club or interest group,
- (6) neighbour,
- (7) I do not want to have anything to do with him/her (max. social distance)

22 target professions followed ...

Research Question

Is subjective Social Distance of Czechs influenced by the social status of occupations? And if so, does the like-me or the prestige effect work?

Method

Survey: Social Distances in the Czech Republic 2007, random sample, N=1197 (IS AS CR)

Items: Modified Bogardus Scale, developed by Laumann (1966) (see Box 1)

Analysis:

- ISEI assigned to 22 target professions (figure 1) [minor changes in ISEI to fit current Czech society]
- Respondents grouped into five social classes (according to EGP scheme)
- Comparison of means of social classes using ANOVA
- *Linear Regression:* explaining power of the ISEI of the target profession on its mean value of the Social Distance Scale in the particular class of a respondent

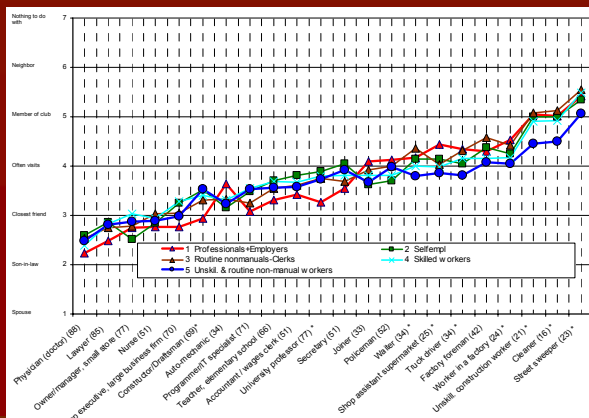


Figure 1: Mean Social Distances scales by social class of respondent (EGP5), *mean differences among EGP classes significant at p<0,05 (one-way anova)

Results

Means comparison

- Close reactions to all target professions prevail. Highest Social Distance mean value in all classes shows the street-sweeper, the lowest the physician. High correlation of the scale mean values with ISEI ($r=0,75$).
- General trend of low Social Distance to high status professions and *vice versa* in all classes. This points out to prevailing of the *prestige effect*.
- But significant differences among the classes can be found in the Social Distance to blue collar target professions (figure 1). This points out to the relevancy of *like-me effect* in case of blue collar target occupations.

OLS estimation: ISEI of target professions predicting Social Distance

- Standardized regressions: significant negative impact of the ISEI of a target profession on its Social Distance mean value in every class (see table 1). → **Prestige-hypothesis valid**
- Unstandardized regressions: negative impact of ISEI on the Social Distance decreases from the upper class of professionals to the lower unskilled worker class (except for class of self-employed) (see box 2 and figure 2) → **Like-me hypothesis partly validated**

Two Mechanisms Producing Social Distance to Different Occupations

Like-me principle: people prefer to establish intimate contacts with persons of equal status

Prestige effect: a higher status of an imaginary profession leads to a smaller distance of a person regardless of his/her status

Professionals: $y = 5,4 - 0,046x$
 Self-employed: $y = 4,9 - 0,024x$
 Routine-clerks: $y = 5,2 - 0,030x$
 Skilled workers: $y = 5,0 - 0,025x$
 Unskilled workers: $y = 4,6 - 0,020x$

Box 2: unstandardized regressions

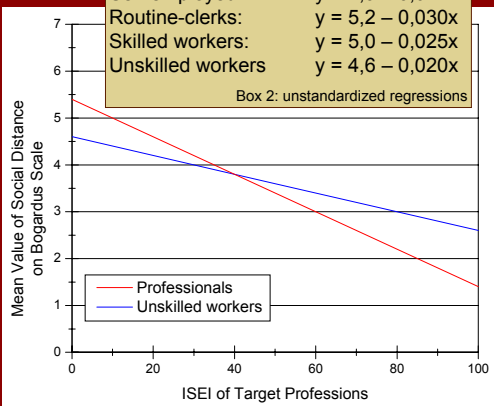


Figure 2: unstandardized regression of ISEI scores on mean values on the mean values on the Bogardus Scale

CLASS	Beta (stand.)	R Square
Professionals	- 0,86**	0,74
Self-employed	- 0,68**	0,46
Routine-clerks	- 0,77**	0,60
Skilled workers	- 0,75**	0,56
Unskilled workers	- 0,68**	0,46

Table 1: standardized regressions, **significance p<0,01

Further results:

- the effect of *prestige* is generally 2.7 times stronger than *Like-me* (OLS of 26334 cases - Social Distances to 22 target professions restructured into groups of related cases)
- typology of Social Distance scale reaction represents two different types of class consciousness: *corporate* → *like-me* (life chances depend on group belonging; interclass relationships are antagonistic) and *competitive* → *prestige* (personal factors influence social position)

Summary and Discussion

The analyses show that the subjective Social Distance expressed by Czechs is influenced by the social status of a target profession. We find a trend of smaller distance to high prestigious professions, proving the prevalence of the *prestige-effect* in the perception of the occupational structure. This trend is accompanied by a smaller distance of lower classes to low-status together with higher distance to high-status professions compared to upper classes. This indicates also a partial validity of the like-me hypothesis.

Generally the results show a prevailing **competitive class consciousness**. Further research on the individual level has to clarify where the *Like-me* effect is relatively stronger, i.e. explain to what extend corporate class consciousness may appear in lower classes (image of “us and them”).

For more see [Häuberer, Šafr 2008a,b] at <<http://www.socdistance.wz.cz>>

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Literature:

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