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## THE ROLE OF CONTACT IN REDUCING SOCIAL DISTANCE OF YOUTH FROM THE BALKANS TOWARDS MINORITY GROUPS<sup>2</sup>

Research on intergroup relations in the Balkans typically reveals low trust and high prejudice, even in the young generation born after the conflicts in the 1990s. The intergroup contact is documented to be an efficient means for prejudice reduction, and it is expected to work through enhancing perceived out-group heterogeneity. A total of 1046 young people aged 13 to 18 from five Balkan countries (Serbia, Montenegro, FYRoM, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo) were interviewed for the research. We registered their attitudes towards five minority groups: a dominant ethnic minority in the country, Roma population, gays/lesbians, and very poor and physically disabled people. We also registered their contacts with the out-group members and perceived heterogeneity of all five groups. Data showed the similar pattern of social distance in all five Balkan countries: it was the highest towards gays and lesbians, followed by ethnic minorities and Roma population, whilst it was the lowest towards physically disabled and very poor people. However, the young people from Kosovo consistently reported somewhat higher distance towards all five groups. As expected, a path analysis revealed that more contacts with the out-groups led to a lower social distance both directly and indirectly, mediated by perceived out-group heterogeneity. We also registered a positive relation between ethnic identification and distance towards minority out-groups.

This research highlights the importance of fostering different types of intergroup contacts. It also suggests that it would be more informative if we broadened its scope, and investigate both ethnic, and other social groups, especially different types of stigmatized minorities.

**Keywords:** social distance, contact, minority groups, Balkan countries, youth

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Two decades have passed since the tragic wars in the Balkan region, but the effects of the war have been still evident: ethnic tensions in daily politics, ethnic stereotyping and discrimination toward non-majority groups. Data from the region have indicated great prejudice not only toward ethnic minorities, but also toward other minority groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Puhalo, 2009; Turjačanin, 2011), Montenegro (CEDEM, 2013), FYRoM (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Ivanov, 2008), Serbia (Bajović, 2013; Ivanov, 2008; Kalaba, 2013; Mihić & Mihić-Lisul, 2003) and Kosovo<sup>3</sup> (Hetemi, Duri, & Haskuka, 2013). Therefore, it is of great importance to investigate psychological mechanisms that might promote tolerance and acceptance of different minority groups in the Balkan region. The crucial question is what are the mechanisms and processes that promote tolerance and reduce social distance toward minority groups. The contact hypothesis offers a possible theoretical explanation with broad empirical confirmation that contact leads to the social acceptance of a minority group. Investigating the role of contact in prejudice reduction would lead to better understanding of prejudice, as well as offer specific ways for prejudice reduction.

Allport (1954) assumed that contact with out-group member(s) would reduce prejudice. He investigated how contacts with different groups lead to reduction of prejudice and promotion of positive social attitudes and acceptance (Allport, 1954). The contact hypothesis was probably the most influential and most widely studied social psychological concept of prejudice reduction through direct contacts with the out-group members. Empirical evidence from multiple countries confirmed that the intergroup contact highly corresponded with the positive intergroup attitudes. A positive effect of the contact on social behaviour was confirmed toward different groups: homosexuals, psychiatric patients, racial and ethnic minorities (Herek & Capitanio, 1996). In early Allport's version, the contact was defined by equal status, common goals, cooperation, support of authorities, and law (Dovidio, 2003). Further research diversified type of contact (quantitative and qualitative) and its operationalization (a time spent accompanied by out-group friends, disclosure to out-group friends, inclusion, friendship circle, a number of friends, or feeling closeness to out-group friend) (Davies et al., 2011). Other studies explored the effects of the contact on different samples (McGlothlin & Killen, 2010; Mihić & Mihić-Lisul, 2003), on perception of discrimination, support for ethnic activism, and job satisfaction (Pettigrew et al., 2011; Tropp et al., 2012).

Studies also investigated mechanisms through which the contact affected attitudes and behaviour, searching for relevant cognitive, affective or behavioural mediators. Mostly tested mediators were the following: new information about the out-group, in-group reappraisal (Pettigrew, 2009; Vezzali & Giovannini, 2012), attitude generalization (Schmid et al., 2012; Tausch et al., 2010),

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<sup>3</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on *status*, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on Kosovo.

anxiety, perspective taking (Vezzali & Giovannini, 2012), empathy (Harwood et al., 2011), trust and threat (Dhont & Hiel, 2011), and perceived out-group heterogeneity (Brauer, 2011; Cehajic et al., 2008; Cehajic et al., 2009), as well as many others (Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Spanovic et al., 2010).

Intergroup contacts might facilitate acceptance of the out-group, through the perception of heterogeneity of its members (Brauer & Er-rafy, 2011). In more conservative societies, it is possible that members of minority groups which differ from our own group are seen as all alike with no difference, which could be another factor that leads to hostile behaviour. Perceived out-group heterogeneity is the tendency to perceive the out-group as more homogeneous with less variability than the in-group. This process may result in negative attitudes, judgement or treatment of out-group. Experimental studies have confirmed that if people perceive variability of a target group they hold less prejudiced attitudes and discriminate fewer members of the out-group. Therefore, the change in a cognitive sphere as one possible effect of contact might result in reducing social distance toward minority groups.

Identification with the particular group has a fundamental role in structuring individual behaviour, and has a great effect on cognitive, affective and behavioural response toward others. The importance of people's identification with the in-group and a tendency to negatively perceive the out-group is mostly referred by the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In post-war societies, it is expected that national identification could be associated with in-group favouritism and distance from minority groups. Empirical data from the Balkans indicate that a nation is one of the most important components that people use in the process of defining themselves (Milošević, 2007) and that the in-group national identification along with contact has an effect on social distance (Cehajić, 2008). Strong national identification could lead to non-acceptance of other ethnic and minority groups.

In this survey, we measured social distance toward five minority groups (LGBT population, physically disabled, the poor, Roma population, and a dominant ethnic minority), and examined the difference among the youth in the Balkan countries. The measured minority groups presented a variety of types of stigmatization (visible and non-visible, such as physically disabled/gays and lesbians; controllable and non-controllable, such as very poor/ethnic minorities) and a degree of stigmatization. Ethnic minorities were included to reflect regional ethnic tensions from the past; Roma population was included as typically most discriminated against in Eastern and Central Europe. Furthermore, using SEM analysis, the model of direct and mediated effects of contact and national identification on social acceptance was tested for each minority group.

We examined two hypotheses in this survey: a) Youth holds social distance toward minority groups in all countries of the Balkan region to similar degree and pattern; b) Contact with the minority groups is in positive relation with better acceptance of the given out-group (directly and mediated by perceived

out-group heterogeneity), while strong national identification is in negative relation with acceptance of minority groups (Figure 1).

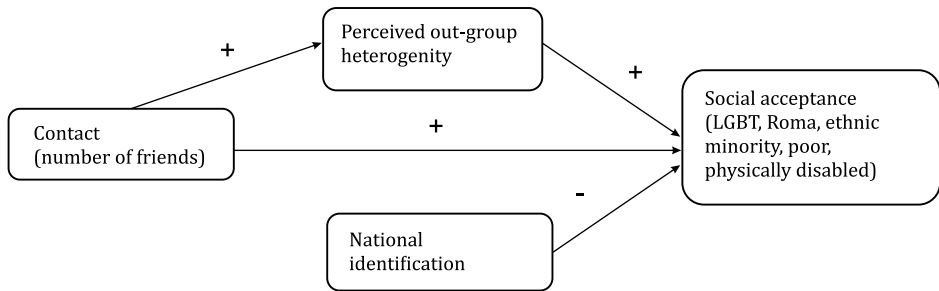


Figure 1. Tested model – the role of contact and national identification in reduction of social distance.

## Method

### Participants and procedure

The questionnaire was developed in the English language, translated in local languages and administrated in each country. Approximately 40 pilot interviews were conducted within the region and did not show any difficulties in questionnaire clarity and relevance in local communities, confirming the appropriateness of the instrument.

The major questionnaire was administered by the telephone interview to 1046 participants aged 13 to 18 years. All participants had required the parent's approval. The survey was conducted in five countries of the Balkan region: Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BIH), FYRoM, Montenegro and Kosovo. The average length of the interview was 26 minutes. Data were gathered via IPSOS Strategic Marketing country offices in the region, in April 2013. Approximately 200 respondents participated in the survey from each country, and the sample was representative for the youth population, stratified to match key characteristics of the youth per country (two staged stratified combined probability sample). Primary sampling units were the households: one household comprised people living in the same dwelling. Secondary sampling units were the youth respondents. Allocation of the sample by stratum was proportional to the size of the stratum. To optimize the sample plan and reduce sampling error, the sample was stratified by a type of settlement (urban-rural), regions, two age groups within the target group and gender. Table 1 summarises the demographic characteristics of the sample. Fieldwork control contacted by phone covered ten percent of randomly selected respondents, to check whether the interview had occurred and if it was in accordance with all given procedures.

Table 1  
*Demographic profile of the sample*

Demographic characteristics		%
Country	Montenegro	19.4
	Serbia	20.6
	Kosovo	20.1
	FYRoM	20.2
	BiH	19.8
Gender	Male	50.2
	Female	49.8
Settlement type	Urban	57.8
	Rural	42.2
Age	13	5.6
	14	10.2
	15	30.7
	16	15.7
	17	15.7
	18	22.1
Average grade	Excellent > 4.5	41.5
	Very good 3.5–4.5	39.6
	Average and lower < 3.5	18.9
Total number of respondents		1046

## Instruments

We targeted five minority groups that varied broadly according to the type and degree of stigma: gay and lesbian people, ethnic minorities, Roma, extremely poor and physically disabled. The main ethnic minority was chosen on the basis of ethnicity of respondents, and it differed for each country. For example, Serbs in Serbia were asked about Kosovo Albanians, Kosovo Albanians were asked about Serbs in Serbia; Macedonians were asked about Albanians, Macedonian Albanians were asked about Macedonians in FYRoM; Montenegrins were asked about Albanians, and Albanians were asked about Montenegrins in Montenegro; ethnic Albanians were asked about Serbs, and Serbs were asked about Albanians in Kosovo; Bosnians were asked about Serbs and Serbs were asked about Bosnians in BiH; Albanians were the targeted ethnic minority group for most respondents in the survey (from Serbia, Montenegro and

Bosnia). The largest ethnic minority in each country was selected as a target for the ethnic out-group.

**Out-group heterogeneity** was measured by two questions, adapted from a well known scale (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998): "I believe that all ... are alike."; "Although ... constitute a group, there are many differences between them." Respondents were answering questions on the scale from 1 = *I do not agree at all* to 5 = *I completely agree* for each measured minority group, and one score of out-group heterogeneity was created for each minority group.

**Intergroup contact** was measured by quantity of online and offline contact scale (Zagefka & Brown, 2002), by two questions asking the youth for an approximate number of friends among five measured minority groups "How many online/offline friends do you have among ... ?". The scale ranged from 0 = *none*, 1 = *less than five*, 2 = *five to ten* to 3 = *more than ten*. A single measure of contact was created (Voci & Hewstone, 2003) for each minority group (summing the score from one to ten for a measure of the intergroup contact). Reliability are presented in Table 2.

**Social distance** was measured by four questions, using acceptance scale from 1 = *lowest* to 5 = *highest* (Bogardus, 1925): 1. "I wouldn't mind if my next door neighbour was ... "; 2. "I wouldn't mind if I am sitting on a bench with ... "; 3. "I would not mind having a close friend with somebody from ... "; 4. "I wouldn't mind dating a person with disabilities (an option for minority groups: the poor, an ethnic out-group, Roma, disabled)"/"I wouldn't mind if somebody sees me in a company with LGBT person (an option for LGBT)". The general social distance scale for each minority group was ranked from 4 to 20 in total. A lower score represented greater distance toward the minority group. Reliability are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Cronbach's alpha for scales of contact and social distance*

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	
	Intergroup contact	Social distance
LGBT	.59	.88
Ethnic minority	.82	.88
Roma	.72	.83
Physically disabled	.68	.76
Very poor	.77	.78

**National identification** was assessed by adaptation of the well-known scale (Brown et al., 1986), with three questions on a five-point attitude scale ("I feel as ... "; "Being a ... is an important part of self-image.", "I am glad to be a ... "). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .77.

**Socio-demographic variables** were measured with a standard set of questions comprising of age, gender, settlement type (urban/rural) and nationality.

All the above mentioned items (with the exception of socio-demographic questions and contact questions) were answered on a five point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 to 5: 1 = *I don't agree at all*; 2 = *I mainly don't agree*; 3 = *I am not sure*; 4 = *I mainly agree*; 5 = *I completely agree*.

## Results

The Balkan youth reported distance toward gays and lesbians, followed by distance toward ethnic minorities (mostly Albanians), and Roma population (Table 3 and Table 4). The higher acceptance among the youth in the Balkan countries was toward physically disabled and very poor people. Expectedly, distance was the highest for the very close relationship like "being seen with LGBT/having a boyfriend, girlfriend from a minority group" and the lowest for not so close contact, such as "having a neighbour who is..." from a minority group. Data showed the similar pattern of social distance in all five Balkan countries.

Table 3

*Social distance toward minority groups in the Balkans (a percentage of the youth who do not agree or mainly do not agree with a specific statement)*

Social distance in % - "I wouldn't mind ..." (don't agree + mainly don't agree)	LGBT	Ethnic minority	Roma	Poor	Physically disabled
... having a neighbour who is ...	46.7	39.6	25.6	6.7	7.8
... sharing a desk with a ...	59.5	43.7	30.2	6.1	10.1
... if my close friend was a ...	61.8	45.1	33.8	6.3	10.0
... being seen with LGBT/having a boyfriend, girlfriend from ...	63.2	67.4	66.0	16.5	31.9

Differences in the social distance toward non-major groups among the Balkan countries are presented in Table 4. t-test has been calculated for each country related to mean in the Balkans, and the statistical significance of t-test is shown.

The rank of the most and the least accepted minority groups is the same in each country: gays/lesbians, ethnic minority and Roma are the least accepted, while physically disabled and very poor people are the most accepted in all countries of the Balkan region. Worth mentioning was the youth population

from Kosovo, who reported somewhat higher distance toward LGBT, the ethnic out-group, and other minority groups in comparison to youth from other Balkan countries. Youth from Kosovo, who consistently reported more conservative behaviour, had statistically significant larger social distance toward all measured marginal groups, especially toward the ethnic out-group and Roma population (Table 4). Serbia and FYRoM differed the least from the region, while the youth from Montenegro and BiH reported higher acceptance of the minority groups. Finally, less variability among the countries for the most expected group (very poor) was observed.

Table 4  
*Mean (SD) and t-test for social distance toward five minority groups in the Balkan countries*

Social distance		Total	MN	Serbia	Kosovo	FYRoM	BiH
LGBT	<i>M</i>	9.59	10.16	10.01	6.98	9.61	11.22
	<i>SD</i>	5.39	5.63	5.44	3.58	5.28	5.83
	<i>t-test</i>		1.45	1.14	-10.58**	0.05	4.02**
	<i>df</i>		202	214	209	209	206
Ethnic minority	<i>M</i>	10.92	13.03	10.52	6.28	10.81	14.10
	<i>SD</i>	5.38	5.27	5.24	3.09	4.69	4.76
	<i>t-test</i>		5.72**	-1.10	-21.78**	-0.34	9.60**
	<i>df</i>		202	214	209	209	206
Roma	<i>M</i>	12.25	13.13	13.87	7.91	12.03	14.31
	<i>SD</i>	4.78	4.40	4.27	3.71	4.18	4.40
	<i>t-test</i>		2.86**	5.56**	-16.94**	-0.75	6.74**
	<i>df</i>		202	214	209	209	206
Physically disabled	<i>M</i>	15.98	16.42	16.27	14.59	15.82	16.82
	<i>SD</i>	3.75	3.17	3.71	4.36	3.48	3.53
	<i>t-test</i>		1.97*	1.16	-4.62**	-0.65	3.43**
	<i>df</i>		202	214	209	209	206
Poor	<i>M</i>	17.18	17.73	17.35	15.83	17.41	17.57
	<i>SD</i>	3.44	2.83	3.45	4.24	2.88	3.25
	<i>t-test</i>		2.76**	.74	-4.62**	1.17	1.73
	<i>df</i>		202	214	209	209	206

*Note.* Social distance scale ranked from 4 to 20; lower mean represents lower acceptance.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .



We calculated bivariate correlations among the measured variables to explore the first order relation among the measured variables. Correlations were mostly in the directions that we predicted (Table 5). There was small, but statistically significant correlation of contact with most of the measured variables. Stronger correlation of contact with social distance was presented for groups with the more frequent contact (the main ethnic out-group and Roma). As expected, the national identification was in negative correlation with other variables, suggesting that stronger national identification was correlated to less contact and less perceived variability of the non-majority out-group.

Table 5  
*Correlations for measured variables*

	1	2	3	4	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
LGBT						
1. Contact	/	.10**	-.11**	.21**	0.22	0.66
2. Out-group heterogeneity		/	-.07*	.27**	5.98	2.02
3. National identification			/	-.20**	13.41	2.41
4. Social distance				/	9.59	5.39
MAIN ETHNIC OUTGROUP						
1. Contact	/	.11**	-.03	.33**	0.63	1.31
2. Out-group heterogeneity		/	-.08**	.27**	6.38	2.06
3. National identification			/	-.23**	13.41	2.41
4. Social distance				/	10.92	5.38
ROMA						
1. Contact	/	.05	-.08*	.33**	1.02	1.44
2. Out-group heterogeneity		/	-.06	.18**	6.40	1.96
3. National identification			/	-.17**	13.41	2.41
4. Social distance				/	12.25	4.78
DISABLED						
1. Contact	/	.00	-.15**	.20**	0.98	1.26
2. Out-group heterogeneity		/	-.05	.15**	6.91	1.88
3. National identification			/	-.03	13.41	2.41
4. Social distance				/	15.98	3.75
POOR						
1. Contact	/	.02	-.07*	.20**	2.00	1.85
2. Out-group heterogeneity		/	.00	.16**	7.09	1.96
3. National identification			/	-.05	13.41	2.41
4. Social distance				/	17.17	3.44

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Following the second hypothesis, we designed and tested a model that includes all tested variables. We expected that contact would correlate with social acceptance directly, mediated by perceived out-group heterogeneity, while the high national identification would correlate to the decrease of social acceptance of minority groups. Main path analysis parameters (RMSEA, CFI, NFI) for all minority groups are reported in Table 6, and due to the lack of space path coefficients for one model (the ethnic minority) are reported in Figure 2.

Values up to .08 for RMSEA represent a reasonable error of approximation in the population (Browne & Cudeck, 1993) and suggest the acceptance of the model. CFI and NFI values below the recommended level of .90 suggest that the model cannot be accepted, and the values above this limit suggest that the model can be accepted (Byrne, 2001). Table 6 presents fit parameters for five models that lay inside conventional acceptance limits: RMSEA values and CFI and NFI were at the recommended level. The best goodness-of-fit indices were calculated in the models for the most accepted groups: very poor and physically disabled people. Although inside the conventional acceptance limits model, fit parameters for less accepted groups, such as LGBT and ethnic minorities, were worse than for the more accepted minority groups.

Frequent contacts with members of minority groups were proved to have direct and indirect positive correlation mediated through perceived out-group heterogeneity with increased social acceptance, while stronger national identification correlated negatively with social acceptance of minority groups.

Table 6

*Most important path parameters for five tested models*

Contact with minority group	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	NFI	RMSEA	AIC
LGBT	6.0	.97	.97	.07	32.01
Ethnic minority	7.2	.97	.97	.08	33.21
Roma	3.8	.98	.98	.05	29.78
Physically disabled	2.7	.98	.97	.04	28.67
Poor	0.2	1.00	.99	.00	26.24

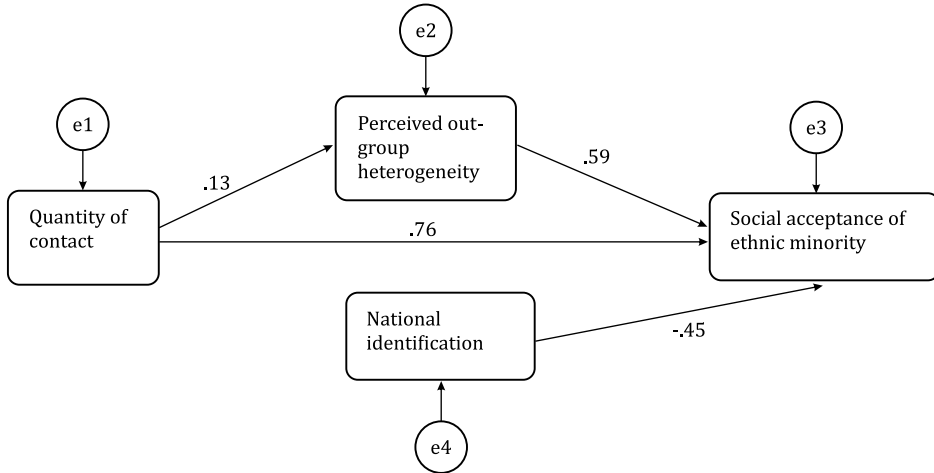


Figure 2. Path coefficients for ethnic minority model.

## Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we measured social distance toward ethnic and other minority groups, and mechanisms through which the acceptance could be increased. The rationale for this research came from the previous empirical data examining the Balkan countries (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Bajović, 2013; Frančesko et al., 2005; Hetemi, et al., 2013; Mihić & Mihić-Lisul, 2003; Turjačanin, 2011). These studies showed the existence of prejudice mostly toward members of different ethnicity, and thus warranted further examination. The current data clearly confirmed the existence of social distance among the Balkan youth not only toward ethnic minorities, but also toward other non-major groups. The boundaries between “my” and “other” groups were strong even at the adolescence, and it was evident that the youth lived in a non-permeable world, hesitating to get to know “others” better. Fortunately, the study also confirmed mechanisms for prejudice reduction: intergroup contact might be an effective strategy for reducing social distance and improving inter-group contacts, even for those minority groups toward which distance was the largest (such as LGBT).

There was no difference among the youth from the Balkan countries in reported ranking of distance toward minority groups. We registered high distance toward gays and lesbians in all the measured Balkan countries. Acceptance of LGBT was low ( $M = 9.59$  on a scale from 4 to 20), followed by a low acceptance of the main ethnic minority ( $M = 10.9$ ) and Roma population ( $M = 12.2$ ). The study confirmed other previous findings that Roma and ethnic minorities were discriminated groups in this region (Frančesko et al., 2005;

Miladinović, 2008; Puhalo, 2003). We found the statistical difference among the countries in the degree of acceptance, showing the youth from Kosovo as the most conservative, and the youth from Montenegro and BiH as the least conservative.

We also tested the power of contact in the social distance reduction following the contact theory (Allport, 1954; Dovidio, 2003; Hewstone & Brown, 1986). The findings were consistent with the contact hypothesis for all five tested minority groups (the poor, physically disabled, LGBT, Roma, the ethnic minority): the more frequent contact youth has with minority groups, the less social distance they have toward a specific group. Therefore contacts could be used for future development of the youth programs in the Balkans, with the aim to reduce distance and increase tolerance toward minority groups. Our data empirically demonstrated that making contacts more frequently would increase perceived out-group variability by promoting cognitive differentiation, and directly and indirectly influencing reduction of social distance. One way to promote social acceptance could be to facilitate more frequent contacts with minority groups in large activities. In contrast, the existence of strong national identification predicts negative behaviour and discrimination toward different minority group. The more adolescents are identified with their own nation, the more negatively they perceive members of any minority out-group.

### **Limitation and further research**

There were some limitations of the research worth mentioning. We relied on self-reported measures of contact and distance, which might increase socially desirable answers. We found strong patterns confirming positive effect of contacts in social distance reduction, which allow us to confirm the importance of contacts. However, we did not measure the effect of negative contacts, which could also be possible and frequent in the inter-group contact. In this study, we implied only cognitive mediators, and not affective mediators that have also been confirmed as important in many studies.

Given the widespread of distance toward minority groups in the Balkan countries confirmed in this study, the establishment of a better contact with minority groups, especially during adolescence, is of outmost importance for decreasing this distance. An affirmative action in producing the frequent and good quality of contacts should promote acceptance and desegregation in the Balkans. Furthermore, it is imperative to investigate other mechanisms and mediators for prejudice, stereotype and distance reduction, in order to create better inclusion practises.

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## ULOGA KONTAKTA U SMANJENJU SOCIJALNE DISTANCE PREMA MANJINSKIM GRUPAMA MEĐU MLADIMA NA BALKANU

Konzervativni stavovi prema manjinskim grupama karakterišu opštu populaciju regiona Balkana, a prisutni su i među mlađom generacijom rođenom nakon nasilnih sukoba 1990-ih godina. Istraživanja međugrupnih odnosa na Balkanu ukazuju na nisko poverenje i visok stepen predrasuda i distance prema manjinskim, posebno etničkim grupama. Stoga je veoma važno da se dalje istražuje ne samo stepen raširenosti predrasuda i distance prema manjinskim grupama, nego i da se traga za načinima za njihovo suzbijanje. Posebno su važna ovakva istraživanja na mlađoj populaciji, jer oni predstavljaju generatore budućih društvenih promena i napretka. Po kontakt hipotezi, jednoj od najviše istraživanih teorija u socijalnoj psihologiji poslednjih decenija, međugrupni kontakt može biti efikasno sredstvo za smanjenje predrasuda, preko različitih kognitivnih, afektivnih i bihejvioralnih mehanizama (Allport, 1954; Hewstone & Brown, 1986).

Istraživanje ima dva cilja: a) da izmeri stepen socijalne distance prema različitim manjinskim grupama među mlađom populacijom u zemljama jugozapanog Balkana i utvrdi saglasnost/različitost među njima; b) da utvrdi povezanost kontakta (direktne i indirektne veze- preko percepcije heterogenosti grupa) i nacionalne identifikacije na distancu prema manjinskim grupama;

Ukupno 1046 mladih uzrasta 13–18 godina iz pet balkanskih zemalja (Srbije, Crne Gore, Makedonije, Bosne i Hercegovine, Kosova) je intervjuisano u ovom istraživanju. U svakoj zemlji bilo je nešto više od 200 ispitanika, koji su selektovani po stratifikovanom reprezentativnom metodu uzorkovanja. Rezultati istraživanja stoga predstavljaju reprezentativnu sliku populacije mladih u pet ispitivanih zemalja. Istraživanje je sprovedeno aprila 2013. godine. Ispitivana je distanca, percepcija heterogenosti grupa i kontakti mladih prema pet manjinskih grupa. Kontakt je ispitivan putem broja prijatelja koje mladi imaju iz svake manjinske grupe. Pet manjinskih grupa prema kojima su ispitivani stavovi mladih su: dominantna etnička manjina u zemlji, Romi, homoseksualci/lezbejke, veoma siromašni i fizički invalidi.

Podaci ovog istraživanja pokazuju da postoji sličan obrazac u izraženosti socijalne distance prema marginalnim grupama u svih pet balkanskih zemalja: socijalna distance je najviša prema homoseksualcima i lezbejkama ( $AS = 9.59$  na skali od 4 do 20), a zatim prema etničkim manjinama ( $AS = 10.9$ ) i romskoj populaciji ( $AS = 12.2$ ), dok je distanca najniža prema fizički hendikepiranim ( $AS = 15.98$ ) i veoma siromašnim ljudima ( $AS = 17.18$ ). Iako je redosled manjinskih grupa prema stepenu socijalne distance mladih isti u svim ispitivanim zemljama, ipak postoje neke statistički značajne razlike među njima. Mladi ljudi sa Kosova dosledno izveštavaju o nešto većoj distanci prema svih pet manjinskih grupa. Posebno je veća distanca mladih na Kosovu prema etničkoj manjini ( $t = -21.78, p < .01$ ) i romskoj populaciji ( $t = -16.94, p < .01$ ). Srbija i Makedonija se najmanje razlikuju od proseka u regionu po socijalnoj distanci mladih prema marginalnim grupama, dok su mladi iz Crne Gore i BiH izveštavali o najvećem prihvatanju manjinskih grupa. Izmerena je manja varijabilnost između zemalja u odnosu na distancu prema najmanje prihvaćenoj grupi (LGBT) kao i prema najviše prihvaćenoj grupi (veoma siromašni).

Kao što se očekivalo, rezultati strukturalnog modelovanja potvrđuju da će više kontakata sa manjinskim grupama voditi većem prihvatanju odnosno nižoj socijalnoj distanci prema njima. Kontakt je u pozitivnoj korelaciji sa nižom distancom, direktno ali i posredovano preko percepcije heterogenosti članova manjinske grupe. Zabeležen je pozitivan odnos između niže nacionalne identifikacije sa sopstvenom grupom i niže socijalne distance prema manjinskim grupama. Snažnija nacionalna identifikacija u relaciji je sa većim stepenom distance prema manjinskim grupama.

Mladi u zemljama Balkana ne razlikuju se po obrascu, ali se razikuju po stepenu distanciranja prema manjinskim grupama. Podaci ukazuju na značaj proširenja obima istraživanja distance prema različitim manjinskim društvenim grupama, ne samo etničkim, posebno onim stigmatizovanim. Takođe, još jednom je potvrđen značaj održavanja različitih vrsta međugrupnih kontakata za saradnju među grupama.

**Cljučne reči:** socijalna distanca, kontakt, manjinske grupe, Balkan, mladi