

What Differentiates the Ethnic Tolerance of Czech University Students? The Role of Field of Study, Family Background, Gender and Friendship*

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Abstract: Working in the context of a rather ethnically homogeneous country, this study examines what differentiates the social distance of university students towards Arab, Ukrainian, Vietnamese and Roma populations. The hitherto neglected effect of the field of study is also of special concern. The authors analysed the results of a large online survey of 3,912 Palacký University students in the Czech Republic. Inspired by Bogardus's social distance scale, we ascertained a significantly greater acceptability of Ukrainians and Vietnamese, on the one hand, and a higher distance towards Arabs and the Roma, on the other hand. Neither the liberalising influence of higher education nor the increased number of students in tertiary education affected the level of ethnic tolerance. With the exception of attitudes towards Roma people, male students and students whose mothers graduated from high school expressed a lower social distance. The research confirmed the contact theory, including the secondary transfer effect hypothesis. Even when controlling for other variables, students in the humanities and social sciences expressed the highest degree of ethnic tolerance. The question remains as to whether greater social distance among health science students and physical culture can contribute to the reproduction of prejudices in the field of health services or leisure sports activities.

Keywords: Bogardus, social distance, ethnic tolerance, university students, fields of study

Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review, 2024, Vol. 60, No. 3: 295–319
<https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2024.021>

* The study was carried out with the support of the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, grants project IGA_FF_2021_023 (Social Sciences 2021) and IGA_FF_2024_032 (Social Sciences 2024).

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Introduction

The present study focuses on the differences in social distance towards four ethnically and culturally defined groups (Arabs, the Roma, Ukrainians and Vietnamese) from the viewpoint of students at various faculties of the Czech Republic's third largest university: Palacký University in Olomouc. In part, study replicates the research on attitudes towards the Roma from 2001, which showed variations in the social distance of students towards this most visible minority across faculties of the same university (Ryšavý, 2003). Moreover, two-decade-old finding has been checked with respect to social distance from Ukrainians, Vietnamese and Arabs. The research results reveal a clear difference between the more accommodating attitudes towards the Ukrainians and Vietnamese, on the one hand, and the more distanced attitudes towards the Arabs and Roma people, on the other hand. The limits of the assumed ordinality in the ranking of the Bogardus scale items pointed out by Ryšavý (2003) was also re-examined. We also controlled for the effect of a number of variables that could influence the degree of social distance, whether it is the characteristics of individual students (gender, duration of study), their study path (type of previous study) or family background. Finally, whether contact with foreigners affects social distance in any way was also tested.

The current article aims to expand on a limited number of studies that include a particular field of study on the list of factors influencing social distance, here as measured by the Bogardus Social Distance Scale. In a partial way, the current study extends the knowledge within the area of the effects of the massification of higher education and growing predominance of women among university students. Having collected data at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic (2021), this study coincided with the period between the so-called migration crisis (2015–2016) and the actual migration wave of Ukrainians fleeing the hardships of war. Finally, the present study represents a unique replication of research on university students' social distance outside the United States.

The structure of the current article is as follows: First, we introduce the key features of social distance research among college students, starting with the US research tradition established by Emory S. Bogardus. The Czech Republic has become a destination country for immigration only in recent decades. As a more ethnically homogeneous country, it represents a contrasting case not only for research conducted in the USA, but also for research from geographically closer Balkan countries. Second, we present three research questions focusing on the differences in social distance over time with respect to four selected groups and factors that may influence students' level of ethnic tolerance. Upon summarising the current state of knowledge, we describe the local context of the new Czech Republic study and variables we included in the analysis. The results section begins with a descriptive analysis, which is followed by a regression analysis to estimate the net effect of the selected variables on the social distance indicators of university students. The Discussion section assesses the main contributions of the research and the limitations of the study.

Social distance research among college students

Despite critique from both theoretical and methodological positions during the twentieth century, the Bogardus scale gained a dominant position in social distance research among college students. In the United States, Emory S. Bogardus established a nearly century-old tradition of research that continues into the twenty-first century (see Bogardus, 1967; Owen et al., 1977; Parrillo & Donough, 2005, 2013). The design of these surveys has changed only slightly over the years, even though Bogardus modified the scale several times. The research among university students enrolled in social science classes has made it possible to monitor nationwide developments over time. However, in research conducted around the world, the social distance scale has undergone a multitude of adjustments, ranging from a number of items included, through their wording and the way in which the answers are selected and to the diversity of groups against which social distance is measured (see, among others, Tusini, 2022; Wark & Galliher, 2007).

Although Bogardus himself compared the opinions of businesspeople and schoolteachers in one of the earliest studies (Bogardus, 1925), he did not repeat the same procedure for college students. Only the students enrolled in sociology courses and related social sciences were included. The courses on minority groups or race relations were omitted. No one has asked whether the restriction to social science students in a narrow sense shows only the tip of the iceberg; indeed, the attitudes of less tolerant groups of students from other fields of tertiary education may remain 'below the surface' and unexamined. Studies from other countries either did not mention the field of study or focused only on one field of study, for example, social work (Helbert & Kim, 2018) or tourism (Kosmaczewska, 2019). However, in their recent study, Velásquez and Eger (2022) recognised the importance of this hitherto overlooked variable. There are rare examples of studies that have taken into account the field of study from the Balkan area and Czech Republic (Djoric & Milojkovic, 2019; Ryšavý, 2003).

With the exception of the United States, research on social distance is concentrated mostly in Europe. In the last few decades, it has been especially widely carried out in Balkan countries (see, e.g., the university student surveys by Djoric & Milojkovic, 2019; Malešević & Uzelac, 1997; Rašković & Vuchkovski, 2016; Šuvaković, 2019). This is not a surprising finding, given the great ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of this region. The Balkan is a place where the Christian West, the Orthodox East and the Muslim South come into contact. Social distance between nationalities is reflected by the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and by longstanding ethnic tensions in the successor states and their neighbouring countries.

In many respects, the Czech Republic represents the opposite case to the Balkan countries. Since the end of the Second World War, the population within the territory of today's Czech Republic has been relatively ethnically homogeneous and consisted predominantly of Czechs. The only visible minority were

Roma people. A deep political and economic transformation of the country and society after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 allowed the country to host immigrants in the same way as in other Western democracies (Seidlová, 2018). Since the beginning of the millennium, the number of foreigners in the country has tripled. With 6% of foreigners in 2021, the situation in the Czech Republic was similar to that of Finland or Portugal (Czech Statistical Office, 2023). The growing proportion of foreigners in the Czech Republic has not yet led to many studies using the Bogardus scale to compare social distance to a larger number of national groups. The study by Wallace (1999), which tracked attitudes towards six groups of foreigners, is a prime example. Another exception is STEM's 2010 research conducted for the Ministry of the Interior, which, in addition to ethnically and culturally defined groups, included other groups that are often targeted by right-wing extremists (STEM, 2010). Most recently, Jonas et al. (2024) examined the connection between social distance towards the Roma, Vietnamese, foreigners in general, and other stigmatized groups and the Big Five personality traits. However, none of these studies addressed attitudes of university students, instead focusing on the general population.

As mentioned above, the research on the attitudes of Palacký University students towards the Roma was one of the few that showed differences in the average level of social distance among students at various faculties (Ryšavý, 2003). However, an explanation for this finding was beyond the capabilities of the research. One can only speculate that some of the mechanisms mentioned in Hello et al. (2006) played a role. Specifically, they mentioned open-mindedness, stressing different aspects of the world or reduced faith in authorities. These factors could be more strongly connected with multiparadigmatic fields of knowledge, such as the humanities and arts or social sciences, than with the technical fields of study or more normative sciences, such as law, education or medicine and health care. However, the composition of faculty students can also hypothetically explain the variation in attitudes. Therefore, in the current research, we focused on the following research questions:

- (a) *Do the variations in average social distance towards the Roma among students at different faculties still hold true after two decades?*
- (b) *Do students of various faculties differ not only in their attitudes towards the Roma but also towards other ethnically and culturally defined groups?*
- (c) *Can the observed variations be explained by the composition of students in different faculties?*

Students' ethnic tolerance over time and towards different groups

As per the first research question, we must limit ourselves to social distance from the Roma surveyed in 2001. Intolerance towards the Roma people is actually quite strong throughout Europe (Strabac et al., 2012), and according to some authors, the general acceptability of anti-Roma prejudice creates a dominant and

unique form of ethnic bias (Kende et al., 2017). In Central and Eastern European countries, the change in the position of Roma people is hampered not only by widespread negative stereotypes, but also by the fact that they are perceived as a realistic threat (Kende et al., 2021). University students can hardly be expected to be an exception in this regard. Nevertheless, this comparison is also relevant from another perspective. At the beginning of the new century, the Czech Republic underwent an accelerated process of tertiary education massification (Trow, 1973; UNESCO, 2021). The expansion of enrolment in tertiary education may increase distance because people socialised in environments where foreigners are perceived as a threat are now more likely to study at a university. The conclusions of the literature on the relationship between tertiary education expansion and ethnic distance have been unclear. According to a British study by Storm et al. (2017), there has been a decrease in social distance towards minorities, but the effect of education appears to have diminished in recent years. In contrast, Thijs et al. (2018) stated that, in the Netherlands, the increase in prejudice is caused by individuals with higher education. Comparing the attitudes of students at one university at the beginning and after the peak of the massification process can contribute in part to understanding these complex relationships.

As per the second research question, increasing the number of groups towards which students declared their attitudes in the 2021 survey allows us to examine whether the differences between the attitudes of students from various faculties are accidental or whether or not they just involve distance from Roma people. The choices of Ukrainians, Vietnamese and Arabs were not random. The Ukrainians and Vietnamese have long resided in the present-day Czech Republic. Moreover, according to the 2021 census, Ukraine and Vietnam were the most represented immigrant groups among the countries outside the European Union. The majority of the population perceives both of them as hard working (Leontiyeva & Vávra, 2009) and has shown a growing degree of sympathy for them in recent years (Tuček, 2020). However, stereotypes picturing Ukrainians with shovels and Vietnamese people as the owners of small convenience stores and fast food outlets have long prevailed. The Arab group is not depicted in terms of a country of origin but as a group united by language and culture. This group was the smallest in present study. However, the presence of medical students from Arabic-speaking countries is a long-standing tradition in the Czech Republic. In addition, the attitudes of the Czech population changed rapidly from 2015–2016 during the so-called migration crisis (Chouliaraki et al., 2017). In the following years, opinion polls of respondents in the Czech Republic began manifesting a strong negative attitude towards Arabs (Tuček, 2022) or Muslims (Rabušic & Chromkova Manea, 2018). Unlike in many European countries, reluctance to help immigrants prevails, even among people with the highest education levels and students (European Union, 2020). This is reminiscent of the response of US students to the 9/11 attacks, which influenced the conduct and results of social distance research in 2001 (Parrillo & Donoghue, 2005).

Factors influencing the ethnic tolerance of students

Much of the research on prejudice and attitudes towards ethnically different groups or migrants refers to Allport's (1954) theory of intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). Different studies focused on the question of under what conditions and in what form the contact between groups weakens prejudices and, on the contrary, when it can strengthen negative attitudes (see, e.g., the opposite findings in Váradi (2014) and Kende et al. (2017) in the case of attitudes towards Roma people). An equally important question is whether contact with one group can influence attitudes towards other groups via the so-called secondary transfer effect (Vezzali & Giovannini, 2012). Even in a relatively ethnically homogeneous society, university students have more opportunities to meet foreigners, either through exchange programmes or through a gradually increasing proportion of incoming foreign students.

If the field of study tends to be an overlooked variable, then comparing the attitudes of males and females is typical. In the US-focused studies by Bogardus, women showed greater social distance. In recent research (Parrillo & Donoghue, 2005, 2013) females had lower social distance scores, but the differences were not always statistically significant. Some geographically and culturally closer studies have either shown no major variation (Djoric & Milojkovic, 2019) or differential attitudes towards minorities (Kudrnáč, 2017). In summary, gender ratios are unlikely to help explain variations in the attitudes of students across faculties. However, their influence should not be underestimated.

The level of education is among the most frequently mentioned factors influencing the degree of social distance towards ethnically or culturally defined *others*. Among the mechanisms that have a positive influence, Hello et al. (2006) included, along with increasing education, a weakening sense of a perceived threat and propensity towards authoritarianism. Education can also increase open-mindedness and help individuals develop cognitive skills. One might ask whether education itself and its liberalising effect (see Velásquez & Eger, 2022) will increase tolerance towards members of ethnically or otherwise defined groups of others. If this applies, there should be an observable difference between the youngest student cohort and students approaching graduation, as confirmed by Parrillo and Donoghue (2013) in the case of US college students. This effect may also explain the variation in attitudes that we focus on in the present study.

Alternatively, we will determine whether the type of secondary education may play a greater role than the duration of tertiary education. It can be assumed that the liberalisation effect will be more pronounced among graduates of secondary general schools (*gymnasium*) with more intellectually oriented subjects in their curricula than among those who attended vocationally or professionally oriented secondary schools. However, we should take into account that the type of secondary school is correlated with the parents' education. There is a strong theory that universities mainly confirm the cultural and social capital that students bring along with them from their families (proved in the case of France

by Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). From this perspective, differences in tolerance may result from students' different family backgrounds. Both ethnic tolerance, which increases with education, and the intergenerational reproduction of prejudices and stereotypes may be at work. Students whose parents achieved a higher education level should show lower levels of distance. In that case, the difference stems not from liberalising tertiary education but from the manner in which families raise their children. We are interested in determining whether the variations in the attitudes of students from different faculties remain persistent, even when controlling for the education of their parents.

Local context of the present study

Palacký University in Olomouc is the third largest university in the Czech Republic, with nearly 23,000 students. Since the turn of the millennium, when the first survey of attitudes towards the Roma population was conducted, the number of students at Palacký University has almost doubled. Eight faculties with hundreds of bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programmes cover most fields of education and training outside of engineering and agriculture. Some of the faculties (e.g. Arts) include a larger number of disciplines. The health sciences are the focus of the Faculty of Medicine and, since its establishment in 2008, of the Faculty of Health Sciences. The faculties at Palacký University differ in the proportion of students enrolled in three-year undergraduate programmes. Multiyear master's degrees prevail in the faculties of medicine and law. This results in longer periods of study, on average. The faculties also differ significantly in the proportion of male and female students. At the time of the present research, male students outnumbered female students only at the Faculty of Physical Culture. On the other hand, the share of female students reached 85% in the Faculties of Education and Health Sciences.

As mentioned above, today's students in the Czech Republic have grown up in a country with an increasing proportion of foreigners. The number of foreign nationals among university students and teachers has also been increasing. At the time of this research, this proportion reached 11% at Palacký University overall but 43% at the Faculty of Medicine. However, foreigners come mainly from linguistically close Slovakia. The number of students from other countries was mostly in the dozens. Most of them study medicine, followed by the natural sciences, art and humanities. On the other hand, a minimum of foreigners (except Slovakian people) study at the Faculties of Education, Physical Culture and Health Sciences. Nevertheless, regular exchange programmes, such as ERASMUS+, may increasingly contribute to contact with foreigners from other countries.

From the school statistics available, it is not possible to demonstrate how much students differ in terms of what high school they attended and the educational background of their parents. However, the EUROSTUDENT VI research showed that high school graduates are more likely to study the natural sciences,

law or medicine, while graduates of vocationally oriented secondary schools make up a relatively larger proportion of students pursuing technical, economic or pedagogical fields as well as the social sciences and humanities. In addition, the graduates of secondary general schools are more likely to come from the families of university-educated parents (Fischer, Vltavská a kol., 2016). In most countries participating in EUROSTUDENT VII, the children of tertiary educated parents were more likely to be studying science, whereas students without a tertiary education background in the family were more likely to be studying subjects in the field of education (Hauschildt et al., 2021). It is likely that the composition of the Palacký University faculties varies according to the type of high school attended as well as the educational background of their parents.

In summary, if the composition of students varies across faculties, studying a particular field may not be a significant predictor of social distance, even in the case of the differences highlighted in the original 2001 study. Therefore, in the present study, we chose to control for the influence of those variables, which may provide alternative explanations for the observed differences.

Data source and variables

The current study is based on data collected from the *Students Palacký University 2021* project, in which an extensive online survey of Palacký University students was conducted in May 2021. The transition to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic did not allow for face-to-face interviews. Therefore, the CAWI method was chosen instead. We invited all reachable students to participate in the research via e-mails repeatedly sent to their university addresses and via other supporting channels. Nearly 5,000 students participated in the survey, which is 22% of the overall student body. The response rate was greater among full-time students than among part-time students. In the current study, we worked with a subset of answers from full-time students who answered the question of whether they had friends or acquaintances with foreigners (N = 3912). The structure of the respondents corresponded relatively well to the known characteristics of the base set (Table 1). Female students (74% answering vs. 68% studying of all full-time students) and students of the Faculty of Arts (32% vs. 25%, respectively) were overrepresented. In contrast, the representation of respondents from smaller faculties was lower (e.g., 9% of the university's students attended the Faculty of Law, but only 6% of the respondents came from there). For these reasons, we used weighted data, where appropriate.

Dependent variable

Social distance was measured in the same way as in a survey of attitudes towards the Roma among a randomly selected sample of students in 2001 (see Ryšavý, 2003). The question was as follows: 'Imagine you are in a situation where you

have to decide for yourself, regardless of the opinion of your family or the people around you. In such a situation, would you accept a Ukrainian (Vietnamese/Roma/Arab) person as a life partner, friend, neighbour, coworker or Czech citizen?' We proceeded differently than Bogardus in several respects. First, we used five items instead of seven. Two extreme variants were omitted. This limitation corresponds to the recommendation of Parrillo and Donaghue (2013) that *accepting as visitors only to my country* and *barring from my country* are too extreme responses for these times. Second, we applied items from one of the first versions of the social distance scale (Bogardus, 1925) and not from the one that became more dominant later on (Bogardus, 1960). The reason for this was that the 2001 survey relied on the Bogardus Social Distance Scale taken from a Slovak translation of a foreign textbook (Krech et al., 1962). Third, in contrast to Bogardus's approach, the respondents rated each of the distance levels on a 4-point scale: (1) 'definitely yes'; (2) 'mostly yes'; (3) 'mostly not'; (4) 'definitely not'. The use of the Likert scale is not exceptional (e.g., Hagendorn & Hraba, 1987; Kosmaczewska, 2019). We agree with Mather et al. (2017) that Likert responses provide a finer-grained and more nuanced picture of respondents' feelings. Another advantage is the ability to assess the ordinariness of the order of items.

First, from the responses, we created an index of social distance towards the Roma that was comparable to 2001. At the time, the fields of study of today's Faculty of Physical Culture were still part of the Faculty of Medicine, and the students of the Faculty of Education were not surveyed (Ryšavý, 2003). The index of social distance towards Roma people has values of 0 to 5, depending on the number of levels at which the Roma were marked as acceptable (answers 'definitely yes' and 'mostly yes' were assigned a value of 1) or unacceptable ('definitely no' and 'mostly no' were assigned a value of 0). For the faculty comparisons, we further created a DISTANCE index in a similar manner; this included measures of social distance from all four groups (Ukrainians, Vietnamese, the Roma and Arabs) and ranged between 0 and 20. In both cases, the higher the index value, the lower the level of social distance. Moreover, we calculated four separate iScores based on the proposal of Mather et al. (2017), that were obtained from the multiplication of the value on the Likert scale (1–4) and assessed level (from the lowest value of 1 for *citizens* to the highest value of 5 for *life partners*). In contrast to the distance index, the higher iScore values indicate a greater degree of distance. The range of values for each ethnic group is 15 ('definitely yes' at all five levels) to 60 ('definitely not').

Independent variables

Fields of study/faculty: The faculties of the university differ in terms of the number of fields of study. Some are almost mono-disciplinary (medicine, law, health care or education). Others include a larger number of more or less comparable fields of study that cannot be distinguished in the dataset (the Faculties of Sci-

ence, Arts, Theology or Physical Culture). Moreover, many students, especially those enrolled in the arts and humanities or social sciences, study a combination of fields. Therefore, the students included in the analysis are not categorised by field of study. The faculty at which the student was primarily studying served as an indicator.

Year of study: The independent variable 'year of study' was created by combining the variables 'study programme' (three-year bachelors, two-year follow-up master's or five- to six-year master's degree) and a declared year of study. For simplicity, the highest value was assigned to all doctoral students. Based on this adjustment, the quasicontinuous variable had a range of one (freshmen) to eight (doctoral students).

Gymnasium: The dichotomous variable *Gymn* represents the type of secondary school completed. A value of 1 was assigned to those respondents who completed a secondary general school education before entering university (71%). Others came to universities with experience in different types of vocational schools (value 0). However, the composition of secondary school students in the Czech Republic is the opposite (Czech Statistical Office, 2021). Thus, secondary general schools represent the most direct route to universities.

Parents' education: In the regression analysis, we used two dichotomous variables for mothers' and fathers' education. Thus, we can distinguish parents with three levels of education: a) primary education or apprenticeship, b) completed secondary education or c) tertiary education. More than four-fifths of mothers and almost three-quarters of fathers completed secondary education. In addition, one-third of the parents achieved a university degree.

Friendship with foreigners: A simple question tested the contact hypothesis: 'Do you have friends or acquaintances among foreigners who are long-term residents in the Czech Republic?' Half of the respondents answered affirmatively, which is considerably more than opinion polls among the adult population show (PORC, 2020). The Roma cannot be considered foreigners. However, we can use attitudes towards them to test the secondary transfer effect.

The independent variables correlated with each other only slightly (see the correlation table in the Annex). Parental education was the most closely related. This indicates both a relatively high degree of educational homogeneity¹ (see Katriňák et al., 2012) and the extent to which parents (especially fathers) with upper secondary education went on to study at a university.

¹ Spearman's $\rho = 0.43$ in the case of three levels of mothers' and fathers' education. In the case of mothers and fathers with tertiary education: Pearson's $r = 0.39$.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of independent variables and dependent indices

		N	Min	Max	Mean/ Pct	StDev
YEAR	Year of study	3910	1.0	8.0	2.97	1.2
GYMN	Secondary general school	3906	0.0	1.0	71%	-
MOTHER2	Mother – secondary ed.	3885	0.0	1.0	82%	-
MOTHER3	Mother – tertiary ed.	3885	0.0	1.0	33%	-
FATHER2	Father – secondary ed.	3820	0.0	1.0	72%	-
FATHER3	Father – tertiary ed.	3820	0.0	1.0	34%	-
FEMALE		3912	0.0	1.0	74%	-
Faculties	Theology	3912	0.0	1.0	2%	-
	Medicine	3912	0.0	1.0	11%	-
	Arts	3912	0.0	1.0	32%	-
	Science	3912	0.0	1.0	20%	-
	Education	3912	0.0	1.0	18%	-
	PhysCult	3912	0.0	1.0	7%	-
	Law	3912	0.0	1.0	6%	-
	Health	3912	0.0	1.0	4%	-
FRIENDS	Friendship with foreigners	3912	0.0	1.0	50%	-
UScore	Ukrainians	3854	15.0	60.0	26.68	9.5
VScore	Vietnamese	3821	15.0	60.0	26.77	9.4
AScore	Arab	3814	15.0	60.0	31.93	11.7
RScore	Roma	3828	15.0	60.0	35.68	12.3
DISTANCE	All four groups together	3826	0.0	20.0	14.96	4.4

Note: The Mean/Pct column shows the mean values for the length of study (YEAR) and social distance indices and the percentages for the dichotomous variables. Reference groups are not included in the case of completed secondary school (vocational), parents' education (basic) or sex (male). A smaller DISTANCE index indicates greater social distance, while in the case of iScores (Ukrainians, Vietnamese, Arab, Roma), larger values indicate greater social distance.

Results

The primary aim was to ascertain whether, 20 years after the first research, the students of Palacký University showed a greater or lower level of social distance from the Roma. With the exception of the most intimate item (*partner*), there has been a slight decline in the acceptance of Roma people over the 20-year period, leading to an increase in social distance. The average number of levels of declared Roma acceptance changed from 3.2 in 2001 to 3.08 in 2021 with comparable standard deviations (1.5 vs. 1.7).² The chart depicting the share of the respondents who agreed to accept the Roma at the individual level indicates only small changes between the time before the start of the educational expansion (2001) and after its peak (2021) (Figure 1). The massification of tertiary education has not led to a measurable increase in social distance from Roma people, or other circumstances not captured by research have outweighed the effect thereof.

We reaffirmed the finding of Ryšavý (2003) that the order of the distance levels assumed by Bogardus did not apply to the Roma. University students were more likely to accept a Roma person as a friend (66%) than as a neighbour (55%).³ The same was true to a lesser degree for social distance from Arabs. In total, 76% of the students declared that they would be willing to accept them as neighbours, and 79% declared willing to accept them as friends. However, only 74% would accept Arabs as citizens of the country.⁴ Similarly, students were more likely to respond 'Yes' as a friend (and as a neighbour or a coworker) than as a citizen in the case of Ukrainians and Vietnamese people. In the open-ended questions, some reported that judging the acceptability of foreigners as citizens was difficult. It is likely that these difficulties would not have arisen upon using the more usual version of the Bogardus scale, which offers an item *as speaking acquaintances only* instead of an item *as a citizen*. More important, however, is the finding that the inclusion of the item *as a neighbour* disproportionately increases the index of social distance towards the Roma (and, to some degree, towards Arabs).

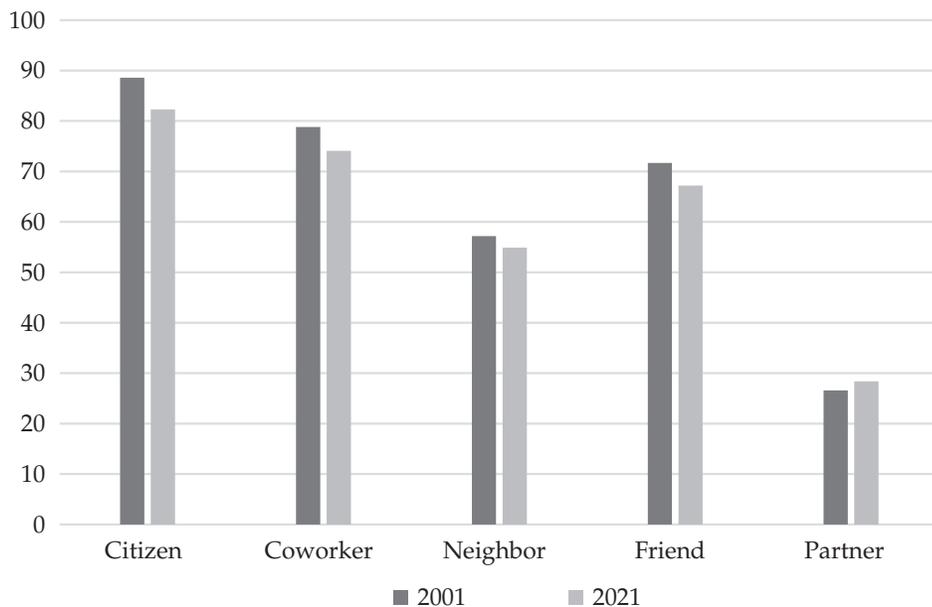
The second objective was to compare the degree of social distance among students of different faculties at Palacký University. The average values for all indices (dependent variables) are skewed towards a lower social distance (Table 1). Figure 2 shows a clear difference between the more accommodating attitudes towards the Ukrainians and Vietnamese, on the one hand, and the more reserved attitudes towards the Arabs and the Roma, on the other hand. The ranking of faculties does not change much for individual iScores. On average, the most tolerant

² Cohen's $d = 0.47$ also shows a relatively small change over time. For the sake of comparability of the data, the answers from students of the Faculty of Education were not included.

³ Guttman coefficient of reproducibility C_R for the whole scale of 2021 was 0.91. However, in the case of items *friend* $C_R = 0.82$ and *neighbour* $C_R = 0.88$. The coefficients' values are slightly higher than in 2001 (Ryšavý, 2003). Calculated according to Řehák (1981).

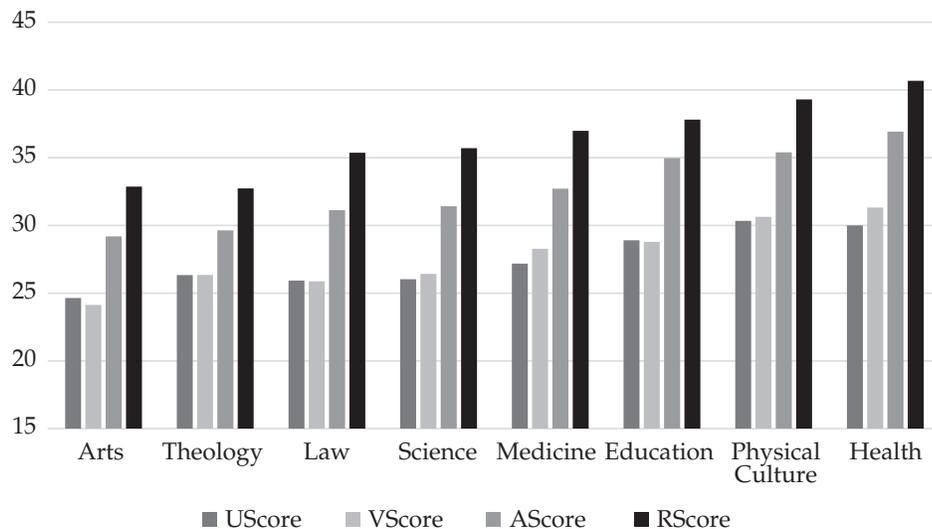
⁴ In the case of Arabs, C_R for the whole scale of 2021 was 0.91. However, in the case of items *friend* $C_R = 0.85$ and *citizen* $C_R = 0.84$.

Figure 1. I would accept a Roma person as... (Sum of 'definitely yes' and 'rather yes')



Note: Does not include students of the Faculty of Education who were not surveyed in 2001. Data from 2021 were weighted by faculty and gender.

Figure 2. Average iScores according to respondents' faculty



students in the Faculty of Arts are distinguished from the students in the Faculty of Theology by their lower social distance from Ukrainians and Vietnamese. Theology students, on the other hand, declared a greater tolerance towards Arab and Roma people compared with students of law and science. Students at the Faculties of Medicine and Physical Culture were among the least tolerant of the Roma in 2001. Twenty years later and 13 years after the split of the Faculty of Medicine, the attitudes of students of the two successor faculties (Medicine and Health Sciences) clearly differed. Students in the Faculty of Health Sciences again showed the highest level of social distance. In 2021, students of the Faculty of Medicine were more tolerant than students of the Faculty of Education, who were not surveyed in 2001.

Ryšavý (2003) used t-tests to determine the statistical significance of differences in the average level of social distance from the Roma, but he did not consider the possible influence of the different compositions of students at individual faculties. Therefore, in the present study, we use a linear regression analysis to answer the third research question. The aim is to determine whether the different structures of students in faculties can explain the detected variations in social distance.

Regression analysis

Linear regression analysis and the ordinary least squares (OLS) method help identify the effects of independent variables. All independent variables were entered into the analysis simultaneously. Table 2 shows the basic results of the regression analysis of the five dependent variables. The DISTANCE index was calculated as an aggregate measure of the acceptability or unacceptability of the four groups. It is worth noting that the positive values of the regression coefficients in the DISTANCE column indicate decreasing social distance. The opposite is true in the case of the specific iScores (Ukrainian, Vietnamese, Arab and Roma). The total share of the explained variance (adjusted R^2) is not high, hence corresponding to the relatively low social distance among university students. However, there are noticeable differences between the effects of the independent variables.

Even when controlling for a number of variables, the field of study represented by the faculty remained the strongest predictor of the level of social distance. This confirms a clear difference between the students of the Faculty of Theology and Arts and the others. The average DISTANCE on the 0 to 20 scale is almost 3 points worse for the Physical Culture and Health Sciences Faculties than for the Faculty of Arts, which serves as a comparative category. The ranking of faculties varies slightly for each iScore. Checking other variables, students of physical culture showed lower tolerance towards the Ukrainians and Vietnamese, while the students of health sciences reported greater distance towards Arab and Roma people. It is worth pointing to a lower degree of social distance towards Arabs on the part of the students of medicine compared with the students of the Faculty of Education. In the case of the Vietnamese and Roma people, the oppo-

Table 2. Results of regression analyses of determinants of total social distance and individual iScores

	DISTANCE	Ukrainians	Vietnamese	Arab	Roma
Constant	14.856*** (0.280)	26.825*** (0.601)	25.538*** (0.589)	31.349*** (0.746)	37.410*** (0.787)
FEMALE	-0.679*** (0.163)	2.091*** (0.349)	2.399*** (0.343)	2.517*** (0.434)	0.045 (0.458)
Theology	0.173 (0.512)	1.341 (1.080)	1.428 (1.077)	-0.250 (1.362)	-0.753 (1.430)
Law	-0.666* (0.299)	1.188 (0.642)	1.645** (0.629)	1.859* (0.796)	2.351** (0.840)
Science	-1.037*** (0.201)	1.920*** (0.431)	2.655*** (0.423)	2.726*** (0.535)	3.024*** (0.564)
Education	-1.550*** (0.210)	3.165*** (0.451)	3.700*** (0.443)	4.473*** (0.559)	3.962*** (0.591)
Medicine	-1.707*** (0.251)	3.196*** (0.540)	4.717*** (0.529)	4.298*** (0.669)	4.865*** (0.708)
Health	-2.799*** (0.356)	4.244*** (0.758)	6.203*** (0.745)	6.544*** (0.947)	6.943*** (0.996)
PhysCult	-2.857*** (0.296)	5.819*** (0.635)	6.714*** (0.622)	6.342*** (0.788)	6.080*** (0.833)
YEAR	0.040 (0.036)	-0.175* (0.078)	-0.018 (0.076)	0.024 (0.097)	-0.198 (0.102)
GYMN	0.450** (0.167)	-0.877* (0.358)	-0.705* (0.352)	-1.231** (0.445)	-1.188* (0.470)
MOTHER2	0.428* (0.200)	-0.889* (0.429)	-0.969* (0.421)	-1.143* (0.532)	-0.970 (0.562)
MOTHER3	0.148 (0.167)	-0.435 (0.358)	-0.278 (0.352)	-0.421 (0.445)	-0.364 (0.470)
FATHER2	0.358* (0.178)	-0.331 (0.381)	-0.573 (0.375)	-0.597 (0.474)	-0.596 (0.501)
FATHER3	-0.164 (0.174)	0.096 (0.373)	-0.016 (0.366)	-0.068 (0.463)	-0.005 (0.489)
FRIENDS	1.192*** (0.142)	-2.859*** (0.304)	-2.525*** (0.299)	-3.207*** (0.378)	-3.325*** (0.399)
Adjusted R2	0.079	0.079	0.095	0.078	0.060
N	3721	3745	3716	3716	3716

Notes: In the DISTANCE index, smaller values indicate greater social distance, while in the case of iScores (Ukrainians, Vietnamese, Arab, Roma), larger values indicate greater social distance. MOTHER2 means a mother with no more than a secondary school education. MOTHER3 means tertiary education and so forth. Unstandardised regression coefficients (standard errors).

Significance levels: ***0.001; **0.01; *0.1. The significance level is only indicative because the sample of respondents was not obtained by probability sampling.

site is true when controlling for the influence of other variables. There are a few students from Arab countries at Palacký University, but most of them study at the Faculty of Medicine.

The regression coefficients in the FRIENDS variable row show that students who have foreign friends or acquaintances expressed lower social distance from all groups. In other words, the attitudes of the university students corresponded to the expectations of intergroup contact theory as well as to the secondary transfer hypothesis. This is worth noting, especially in the case of social distance from the Roma, for whom most of the other factors proved to be insignificant. As the regression coefficient in the iScore Roma column shows, neither gender, year of study nor parents' education has a visible effect on the distance towards the Roma.

The graduates of secondary general schools (*gymnasium*) declared a lower social distance from all groups without distinction. Except for attitudes towards Roma people, the same was true for the children of mothers who had completed some form of upper secondary education. Either there is a liberalising atmosphere in this type of education, or it is an effect of school choice in which the parents of prospective university students are largely involved. The second mentioned alternative would explain why we did not observe a stronger effect of parents' university education on social distance (perceived by their children).

In contrast to the expectation of liberalising tertiary education, the effect of the duration of tertiary schooling was rather weak. Social distance usually does not decrease with increasing years of study at a university. Recent events could contribute to the unique influence of this variable on the distance from the Ukrainians. Those who entered university around the time or soon after the annexation of the Peninsula of Crimea by Russian forces in 2014 reported greater tolerance towards Ukrainian people.

Female students showed a slightly greater degree of social distance at all times, except for the Roma. However, this association did not eliminate the evident differences among the students of the individual faculties. On the other hand, the variations shown in Figure 2 reflect the differences in the composition of the faculty students. The lowest share of contact with foreigners and, conversely, the highest representation of female students increase the values of social distance indices for the Faculties of Education and Health Sciences. Furthermore, there are also smaller proportions of secondary general school graduates and students whose mothers have completed upper secondary education. The opposite is true for faculties of medicine and science.

Discussion

We have demonstrated a significant effect of a variable that is still marginalised in studies of university students' social distance. The field of study substantially contributes to social distance towards ethnically and culturally defined groups.

Using a regression analysis allowed us to control for the influence of a set of variables that could provide alternative explanations for variations in social distance among students from different faculties.

Given the differences in ethnic tolerance of students from different faculties, it would be appropriate in future research to include parallel surveys at schools with fields of study that have not yet been included (Engineering; Agriculture; Economy and Business). Another limitation of the present study is its restriction to a single university town. Students have significantly more opportunities to establish closer relationships with foreigners in the capital city of Prague or in the second largest city, Brno. For example, Hasman and Divínová (2020) showed regional differences in high school students' attitudes towards international migration.

The results of our research differ in several respects from those of long-standing surveys of social science students in the United States. Starting with gender differences, not even the long-term and growing predominance of women among students at Czech universities has led to the change observed in the past among social science students in the United States. Parrillo and Donoghue (2005) pointed to a significantly greater tolerance of American female students, among others, towards Vietnamese and Arabs, which was the opposite at Palacký University 20 years later. The distance score of female students towards Ukrainians was also greater here, with no differences between genders observable only with respect to the Roma.

The degree of ethnic tolerance also does not seem to result from the liberalising effect of additional tertiary education. Unlike Parrillo and Donoghue (2013), there were no significant differences among junior and senior students. In the Czech context, the type of secondary school is of greater importance. Secondary general schools (*gymnasiums*), which are a typical precursor to higher education, can promote both multicultural awareness and an environment in which children from better-off families and social strata are concentrated. It is difficult to distinguish between the effects of these two different explications. However, the combination of the effect of the type of secondary schooling, which may mask the influence of parents' higher education and the beneficial effect of mothers' secondary schooling in particular, is more evidence of the complexity of intergenerational reproduction of attitudes and stereotypes rather than the straightforward liberalising effect of education itself.

The minimal differences in distance towards the Roma over the 20-year period suggest that the expansion of tertiary education may not lead to a deepening of social distance. The present research did not address a verification beyond the attitude towards the Roma. This result corresponds, however, with the conclusions of Katrňák and Hubatková (2022), according to whom the expansion of tertiary education in European countries only slightly weakens inequality in educational opportunity.

In line with a number of previous studies summarised in Pettigrew and Tropp (2005), the present study confirmed the assumptions of intergroup con-

tact theory. Students who reported having foreigners among their friends and acquaintances expressed more positive attitudes than those without such relationships. An important finding is the support for the secondary transfer effect hypothesis (Vezzali & Giovannini, 2012). The students with closer contacts with foreigners also distanced themselves to a lesser degree from members of the most frequently rejected group, that is, the Roma.

The present study is far from the first to point out that the order of social distance levels compiled by Bogardus may not be universally applicable (see, e.g., Lambert, 1952; Mather et al., 2017; Weinfurt & Moghaddam, 2001). We consider the repeated finding that some students would accept a Roma person as a friend and, at the same time, that they would not accept him/her as a neighbour to be factually significant. This surprising connection in all probability stems from different evaluations of different parts of the Roma ethnic group. In this case, an individual would be able to find a friend among the 'Roma elite' and, at the same time, avoid being neighbours with the 'Roma poor' (Ryšavý, 2003, p. 73). In part, this may be an unintended consequence of not complying with Bogardus's request to respond without too much thought.

The differences between the students of the two current faculties, which, 20 years ago, formed a single entity and showed the greatest degree of distance from the Roma, should be considered. The different attitudes of medical students, on the one hand, and healthcare students, on the other hand, are partly because of their different compositions. However, the higher level of social distance on the part of the students at the Faculty of Health Sciences is undoubtedly because of other reasons. This may be because of differences in professional socialisation⁵ and in the experiences of medical and health care personnel when encountering patients from different cultures.

One of the limitations of the present study is that the research was conducted at the tail end of the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2021. Research from the first wave of the pandemic highlighted the risk of increasing hostility and xenophobia towards foreigners because of pandemic apprehensions (Bartoš et al., 2021; Daniels et al., 2021). The level of concern varied over time and eased significantly during the course of the research at Palacký University.⁶ The data collection occurred while the universities were closed and had switched to online forms of teaching. This was why the CAWI data collection method was chosen. The present study has not relied on probabilistic sampling but on a full census with an approximately one-fifth return rate.

⁵ Among other things, examples were found of secondary school textbooks for healthcare staff with very tendentious and stereotype-reinforcing content.

⁶ The longitudinal survey within the project *Life During the Pandemic* in April and May 2021, the first waves of which served as the basis for Bartoš et al. (2021), demonstrated a significantly lower level of concern among the youngest population than in the spring of 2020 (see <https://zivotbehempandemie.cz/>).

Conclusion

In the current study, we answered three research questions. First, we ascertained that the increase in the number of university students in the first two decades of the millennium did not lead to a significant change in social distance from the Roma. Moreover, the numerous cases of students rejecting Roma people as neighbours while admitting to friendships with them point to more than just the question of the universal applicability of the Bogardus Social Distance Scale. The problem is that research in which the neighbourhood with the Roma is the only indicator (e.g., the *European Values Survey*) systematically overestimates the extent of social distance towards Roma people. In research of this type, it would be useful to ask not only about the acceptability of the neighbourhood, but also about friendship with the Roma.

Second, the students of different faculties also differ substantially in their distance from Ukrainians, Vietnamese and Arabs. Third, the research has shown a noticeable influence of several factors that reduce or increase the tendency for ethnic distance, such as closer contact with foreigners, the type of completed secondary school and differences between male and female students. However, the effect of the field of study on social distance remained robust, even when controlling for a number of variables that affect the composition of students in different faculties of a university. Looking at the detected and confirmed differences between students of the humanities and social sciences, on the one hand, and between students of healthcare or physical culture, on the other hand, one may ask whether American national studies also only reported the attitudes of the most tolerant sections of students.

A more thorough explanation of the identified differences could be the subject of further research justified, for example, by the typical career paths of university graduates. Public discourse concerning ethnic relations can be shaped—through employment in serious media, nonprofit organisations, charities and so forth—by the graduates of faculties with greater ethnic tolerance, namely, Theology, Arts and Law. Secondary school teachers are also often recruited from among the students of the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Science. Graduates of the Faculties of Education, Physical Culture and Health Sciences, in contrast, more frequently pursue healthcare services, leisure sporting activities and primary education. One question for further research is the extent to which stereotypes and prejudices are reproduced in these areas, which will eventually manifest in an increased degree of social distance.

Velásquez and Eger concluded their analysis of data from the Norwegian Citizen Panel by stating that ‘higher education inhibits perceptions of threat that may manifest during “big events” such as a dramatic increase in asylum seeking’ (2022, pp. 605). In recent years, Czech society has dealt with two such ‘big events’. The first was the so-called migration crisis of 2015–2016. When the number of asylum seekers in European countries doubled annually in 2015, only 0.1% of them applied for asylum in the Czech Republic (Eurostat, 2016). Nevertheless, the

Czech Republic experienced the greatest shift in public opinion on immigration and immigrants in Europe (European Union, 2015). The second event is the real migration wave, which occurred in the spring of 2022. Within a matter of weeks, hundreds of thousands of refugees made their way to the Czech Republic from Ukraine, which was invaded by Russian Federation troops. There is a visible contrast between the intense expressions of solidarity with Ukraine, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the intense rejection and distance from those who, seven years ago, fled from war-torn countries such as Syria and Iraq. Because most of today's refugees are children with their mothers, it is likely that contact between Czech and Ukrainian classmates will gradually increase. In this context, it is worth highlighting even a partial finding that contact with foreigners reduces the level of social distance towards the Roma, which has long been one of the neuralgic points of the coexistence and well-being of various groups within Czech society.

The present study has an unfortunate level of current relevance because of the wave of Ukrainian war refugees. It is difficult to determine how much Ukrainian immigration will change the composition of university students within a decade. Moreover, it is impossible to predict how many similar events will occur in the coming years, whether because of war conflicts, advancing climate change or other reasons. However, it may be safe to assume that, in the future, today's university students—whether they become physicians, lawyers or teachers or who occupy other positions of social importance—will significantly affect the public's attitudes towards migrants from different parts of the world.

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Annex

Table I. Correlations between independent variables (Pearson's r)

	FEMALE	YEAR	GYMN	FOREIGN	MOTHER2	MOTHER3	FATHER2
YEAR	-0.03						
GYMN	-0.00	0.09					
FRIENDS	-0.08	0.09	0.05				
MOTHER2	-0.05	0.01	0.23	0.07			
MOTHER3	-0.03	-0.00	0.22	0.06	0.33		
FATHER2	-0.03	0.00	0.20	0.05	0.30	0.25	
FATHER3	-0.04	-0.00	0.18	0.07	0.25	0.39	0.45

Table II. Correlations between independent variables (Spearman's ρ)

	FEMALE	YEAR	GYMN	FOREIGN	MOTHER- EDUC
YEAR	-0.00				
GYMN	-0.00	0.10			
FRIENDS	-0.08	0.07	0.05		
MOTHEREDUC	-0.05	0.01	0.23	0.08	
FATHEREDUC	-0.04	-0.01	0.22	-0.08	0.43