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Looking to the Future for being well-seen: Further evidences about the normative feature of the Future Time Perspective

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Abstract

Recently, the normativity of the Future Time Perspective construct (FTP) has been demonstrated in a French context. In this article, we intend to address the normativity of FTP in other European countries experiencing the crisis and facing important uncertainties regarding their future. The present research aims to replicate and extend this sociocognitive approach to FTP to two other Western societies. Two studies were conducted in Greece and Portugal, using the self-presentation (Study 1) and the judge paradigm (Study 2) of the sociocognitive approach. On the whole, results reveal a general valorization of the FTP construct in these two contexts. Findings are discussed in relation to the hypothesis that FTP is a social norm in contemporary Western societies.

Keywords: Future Time Perspective, normativity, social value, social norm.

Introduction

Recently, research on the concept of Time Perspective (TP) has increased considerably (Sircova et al., 2014; Guignard, Apostolidis, & Demarque, 2014). Yet, considering that its emergence in psychology literature can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century (Lewin, 1942), TP could be considered as a 'new old' concept. Lewin (1951) defined TP as the totality of the individual's views of his psychological future and past existing at a given time. In line with the Lewinian tradition, Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) advanced a broad conceptualization of TP as a foundational process in both individual and societal functioning. For these authors, TP is a non-conscious process in which temporal frames play a leading-connective role in the relationship between personal and social experiences. They help to give order, meaning and coherence to life events.

Constructing a socio-normative approach to FTP

The renewed interest for the TP concept certainly has several explanations, two of which we would like to underline here. First: the development of the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI, Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999) provided a valid (elaborated through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses) and reliable (convergent, discriminant and predictive validity) scale that pointed out the shortcomings of the previous TP scales (D'Alessio, Guarino, De Pascalis & Zimbardo, 2003). This instrument thus opened possibilities to explore TP in various domains as health (Boyd & Zimbardo, 2005), environment (Milfont & Gouveia, 2006; Milfont, Wilson, & Pollyane, 2012) or education (Harber, Zimbardo, & Boyd, 2003). The second reason for this increased interest is that ZTPI is associated with an important number of psychological constructs and behaviours (for an overview, see Sircova et al., 2014). These publications particularly concerned the Future Time Perspective (FTP) sub-

dimension which is often used separately (Adams & Nettle, 2009; Apostolidis, Fieulaine, & Soulé, 2006). Indeed, FTP plays a positive role in pro-social behaviors, like less consumption of drugs (Keough, Zimbardo, & Boyd, 1999; Apostolidis, Fieulaine, Simonin, & Rolland, 2006) and healthy life style (Daugherty & Brase, 2010).

Recently, a psychosocial approach to FTP has been developed in order to analyse the normative aspects associated with this psychological construct, as it is measured by the ZTPI scale (Guignard et al., 2014). The FTP concept measured by the ZTPI-FTP scale is conceived in terms of a planning and goal-oriented attitude, expectations and anticipations of future rewards, thus considering that behavior is dominated by future goals and rewards (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). The renewed interest in this construct and the dispositional way in which it is frequently used in research highlights the need to examine the social roots of TP. Moreover, findings associating FTP with positive outcomes and pro-social behaviors suggest, from a social psychology standpoint, that FTP might potentially be a socially valued (i.e. normative) construct. For example, FTP-oriented individuals generally follow conventions and social norms by doing what is socially valued (Zimbardo, Keough, & Boyd, 1997). Considering that the sociocognitive approach to social norms permits to reveal the social valorization of a psychological construct (Dubois, 2003; Jellison & Green, 1981), this approach was used to demonstrate the social value of the ZTPI-FTP construct in a French context (Guignard et al., 2014). In this research, participants presented themselves as future-oriented in order to be well-seen in an evaluative context (Study 1), and also judged as high the 'social utility' of future-oriented targets (Study 2), which could be interpreted as a correspondence between individual self-management – in terms of cognition and behavior – and social functioning (Cambon, 2006).

The authors interpreted these results in reference to Bourdieu's approach, which considers time experience as a primary psychosocial dimension for understanding how individuals

internalize the social order. From a psychosocial perspective, the authors infer that the social norm paradigms used in these studies propose evaluative situations in which individuals resort to normative knowledge about themselves. Finally, they suggest that FTP might be normative because it corresponds to a normative self-management standard promoted by neoliberal Western societies. This interpretation about FTP as a self-management tool is also consistent with the analyses of what Foucault called the biopolitical government (Foucault, 1979), defined as the intellectual techniques that allow governing in the context of neoliberal societies.

Extending the study of FTP normativity

The sociocognitive approach to social norms strives to study the norms existing in a given context and to relate them to the priorities that define the functioning of our social system (Dubois & Beauvois, 2003). For this reason, it is important to dispose of consistent and reliable findings about the social valorization of the FTP construct in different contexts. However, one could wonder whether FTP normativity (i.e. the social valorization of this construct) is specific to the French context previously studied, or not. If these results obtained in a French context are indeed informative of a biopolitical functioning typically observed in western neoliberal societies, we should also find results supporting the FTP normativity in other Western European societies. We therefore selected Portugal and Greece, two European countries sharing the same neoliberal functioning. Moreover, we wanted to test the FTP normativity hypothesis in European countries currently touched by the crisis, with a specially high level of unemployment for young adults (21.7% for Greece, 14.5% for Portugal, Eurostats, 2012) and thus with important uncertainties regarding their future (Morselli, 2013). Despite the crisis situation we expect these countries to be still oriented towards the future, since ‘better times’ are the main justification for their present sacrifices. The choice of these

two countries was also viable since validated versions of the ZTPI scale were available for both (Ortuño & Gamboa, 2009) (Anagnostopoulos & Griva, 2011).

Overview of the studies

For each country, two studies were conducted using the classical methodological paradigms from the sociocognitive approach to social norms (Gilibert & Cambon, 2003). The self-presentation paradigm (Study 1) was employed to test the hypothesis of a social valorization of FTP. The judge paradigm (Study 2) was used to analyse the kind of social value that is associated with the FTP construct. According to the primary study on FTP normativity (Guignard et al., 2014), we hypothesize that the ZTPI-FTP scale will be used in both countries as a criterion of social valorization (Study 1), and will also be valued to judge other people (Study 2).

STUDY 1: Self-presentation paradigm

The present experimental situation involves requests for a positive and a negative self-presentation in a professional context. This paradigm permits to reveal (1) if individuals *use* the FTP-ZTPI construct as a self-valorization strategy; and also to analyze (2) if they are *clear-sighted* about this functioning. Normative clear-sightedness reflects the knowledge of the social valorization, or normativity, associated with a given construct (Py & Somat, 1991).

Our hypothesis is that, in contexts marked by the current economic crisis such (Morselli, 2013) as Portugal and Greece, participants will also tend to present themselves with high FTP if they seek to *gain approval* from a relevant evaluative referent and tend to present themselves with low FTP if they aim to *gain disapproval*– despite uncertainties concerning their future. Furthermore, we hypothesize that this operating mode is independent from the responses the individuals give in a standard condition, in accordance with the concept of normative clear-sightedness.

Participants

The Portuguese sample consists of 109 participants (97 females, 12 males, *M*age = 23.48, *SD* = 7.78) recruited at the university. The Greek sample consists of 75 participants (52 females, 23 males, *M*age = 20.59, *SD* = 3.35) recruited at the university.

Procedure

Each participant completed the ZTPI-FTP scale three consecutive times. First, participants were asked to answer the FTP scale spontaneously (*standard instruction*). Then, participants were asked to imagine the manager in charge of their application, (who would read their responses) and answer the same scale in order to gain his approval (*normative instruction*) or his disapproval (*counter-normative instruction*). The standard instruction was always presented first, while the order of the normative and counter-normative instructions was systematically counterbalanced.

Measure

Future Time Perspective (FTP)

FTP was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale using the FTP-ZTPI in the validated version of the country: Greek version (13 items, Anagnostopoulos & Griva, 2011) and Portuguese version (12 items, Ortuño & Gamboa, 2009). For each instruction, the FTP score corresponds to the mean value of the responses to the whole scale. The normative clear-sightedness score was calculated by subtracting the score obtained in the counter-normative instruction from the score obtained in the normative instruction.

The internal consistency of the Portuguese (*N* = 12 items) and Greek (*N* = 13 items) versions of the FTP scale was satisfactory in the three types of instruction: standard (α_{Pt} = .69; α_{Gr} = .88), normative (α_{Pt} =.78; α_{Gr} =.91) and counter-normative (α_{Pt} =.94; α_{Gr} =.78).

Results

The FTP score was then submitted to a three-way mixed ANOVA with country (Portugal or Greece) and gender as a between-subject variable and instruction (standard, normative or counter-normative) as a within-subject variable.

Results reveal a main effect of instruction (F (2,360) = 362.7, p<.001, η^2 = .66) and an interaction between instruction and country (F (2,360) = 2.99, p<.05, η^2 = .02). No other effects were significant[1].

The main effect of instruction suggests that, irrespective of the country, the mean score for normative instruction (pairwise comparison with Bonferroni's correction:M = 4.49, SD = .04) was higher than the score obtained under the standard instruction (M = 3.79, SD = .04), which in turn was higher than that observed under the counter-normative instruction (M = 1.95, SD = .06; all p's < .001).

Even if participants from the two countries clearly used FTP to obtain *approval* or *disapproval*, this usage was different between the two countries. After the standard instruction, Portuguese participants present marginally superior scores (M = 3.82, SD = .46) in relation to Greek participants (M = 3.66, SD = .63; t(182) = 1.96, p = .05, Cohen's d = .29). Participants from the two countries did not present different FTP scores after the normative instruction (Portugal: M = 4.50, SD = .48; Greece: M = 4.48, SD = .55; t(182) = .28, p = *ns*), but after the counter-normative instruction, Portuguese participants presented lower FTP scores (M = 1.77, SD = .96) than Greek participants (M = 2.14, SD = .64; t(182) = 2.94, p <.01, Cohen's d = .43).

[1] Main effect of country: F(1,180)=1.71, p=.19.
Main effect of gender: F(1,180)= 1.02, p= .31.
Gender*country: F(1,180)= .03, p= .85.

As the above results suggest, the normative clear-sightedness score was also higher in Portugal (M = 2.73, SD = 1.29) than in Greece (M = 2.33, SD = .87; $t(182) = 2.29$, $p < .05$, Cohen's d = .33). Moreover, neither in Portugal (r = .11, p = *ns*) nor in Greece (r = .07, p = *ns*) was normative clear-sightedness correlated with the FTP score following the standard instruction.

Discussion

These results confirmed our hypothesis about the social valorization of FTP by demonstrating how participants from the two countries strategically used the FTP-ZTPI scale when asked to convey a positive or negative presentation of themselves. This result suggests that even in countries hit by the economic crisis, and thus with uncertain future outcomes (olive tree), FTP orientation remains socially valued.

In general, self-presentation instructions highly influenced FTP scores and participants gave more FTP-oriented answers in strategic *positive* than in *standard* self-presentations. The polarization of the answers according to the instructions provided (normative or counter-normative) and the significant difference between the three scores suggests that FTP is highly valued.

More specifically, results also indicate that Portuguese participants present higher scores of FTP after the standard instruction than Greek participants. Moreover, Portuguese participants also present lower scores than Greek participants following the counter-normative instruction; after the normative instruction these differences are not significant, probably due to a ceiling effect. The normative clear-sightedness score (the absolute difference between the normative and the counter-normative instruction) was also significantly higher among Portuguese compared to Greek participants. These results suggest that Portuguese participants make more use of the FTP orientation as a criterion for social valorization in relation to Greek

participants, a difference that will be further explored in the next study. These differences between the valorization of the FTP orientation between the two countries under analysis were not initially expected, considering that these two European countries are facing similar future uncertainties for younger generations (Morselli, 2013).

Furthermore, high scores of clear-sightedness show that participants are quite familiar with normative issues when strategically answering FTP in evaluative situations. The absence of correlation between the clear-sightedness score and the standard instruction score reveals that FTP social valorization constitutes a meta-knowledge for participants, independent from their own FTP orientation, of which they make use when in normative contexts. These results indicate that participants are knowledgeable about the social value of expressing this construct in order to be well-seen in normative contexts.

But exactly of what type is the social value associated to FTP? And how could the attribution of social value explain the differences in the valorization of the FTP orientation that we have just shown in the first study? We will now examine this question through a second study, using the judge paradigm.

STUDY 2: Judge Paradigm

In the present judge paradigm situation, participants play the role of evaluators of a traineeship application, and are required to give their appreciation about a target person who completed the FTP scale (high versus low FTP target). The judge paradigm is the most decisive paradigm in the sociocognitive approach to judgment norms, because it permits to reveal the kind of social value assigned to a normative target. Beauvois (1995) distinguishes two dimensions: the social desirability value that reflects the 'likeableness' one can attribute to a person and the social utility value that reflects the 'market value' of a person.

Our hypothesis was that participants, in both countries, would attribute higher social utility value to a high-FTP target compared to a low-FTP target. These predictions were based on the fact that generally, to be normative, a characteristic must be particularly socially useful (Dubois & Beauvois, 2005), which is confirmed by previous findings about the normative value of FTP in the French context (Guignard et al., 2014). In the light of the results obtained in Study 1, we also expected that participants from the two countries would attribute different levels of social utility and desirability to the low and high FTP targets.

Participants

The Portuguese sample consists of 114 participants (94 females, 20 males, *M*age = 22.96, *SD* = 5.90) recruited at the university. The Greek sample consists of 73 participants (54 females, 19 males, *M*age = 19.03, *SD* = 4.54) recruited at the university.

Procedure

Participants were presented a questionnaire supposedly extracted from an application for traineeship. They were told that a student interested in getting a job had filled out this questionnaire during a procedure of recruitment.

Four target profiles were elaborated by manipulating the target FTP (low FTP profile: *M* =1.75 vs. high FTP profile: *M* =4.25) and gender. The FTP scale was presented as an authentic questionnaire filled out by a student and was hand-written to increase authenticity.

Measures

Social desirability and social utility were assessed through judgments of targets on the basis of a 12-item list of personality traits (Cambon, 2006). Participants had to evaluate the target on each trait on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*entirely*).

The *social utility* scale consisted in four traits (positive: dynamic, ambitious, hardworking; negative: naive) that reached a satisfactory internal consistency in both countries (α_{Pt} = .68; α_{Gr} = .86). The *social desirability* scale consisted in six traits (positive: sympathetic, sincere, nice; negative: egoistic, pretentious, hypocrite) that also achieved a satisfactory internal consistency in both countries (α_{Pt} = .60; α_{Gr} = .66). The order of presentation of the traits was randomized.

Results

The target ratings on social utility and desirability were then submitted to a four-way mixed ANOVA with country (Portugal or Greece), target FTP profile (low FTP or high FTP), target and participant gender as between-subject variables, and the evaluation dimension (social utility or desirability) as a within-subject variable.

Results show an interaction effect of dimension with the FTP profile ($F(1,171) = 132.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .44$) and of the dimension with the country ($F(1,171) = 6.14$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$). A three-way interaction effect was also found between dimension, FTP profile and country ($F(1,179) = 14.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$). No other effects were significant[2].

The interaction between the dimension and the FTP profile indicates that, irrespective of the country, the high FTP target is regarded as more socially useful ($M = 5.47$, $SD = .9$) than the low FTP target ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .84$; $t(185) = 18.25$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.68$); but both targets are seen as equally socially desirable (high FTP: $M = 4.54$, $SD = .87$; low FTP: $M = 4.40$, $SD = .76$; $t(185) = 1.12$, $p = ns$).

[2]Target gender: $F(1,171) = .05$, $p = .82$
Target gender*FTP profile: $F(1,171) = 2.65$, $p = .11$
Target gender*country: $F(1,171) = .64$, $p = .42$
Respondent gender: $F(1,171) = 1.82$, $p = .18$
Respondent gender*FTP profile: $F(1,171) = 1.97$, $p = .16$
Respondent gender*country: $F(1,171) = .22$, $p = .64$

However, the interactions between dimension, FTP profile and country suggest that the targets are not perceived in the same way across countries. In Portugal, the high and low FTP targets are evaluated differently according to both, their perceived social utility (high FTP: $M = 5.18$, $SD = .87$; low FTP: $M = 3.15$, $SD = .92$; $t(112) = 12.05$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 2.27$) and their social desirability (high FTP: $M = 4.68$, $SD = .85$; low FTP: $M = 4.36$, $SD = .76$; $t(112) = 2.13$, $p < .05$, Cohen's $d = .40$). In Greece, on the other hand, targets were differentiated in relation to their perceived social utility (high FTP: $M = 5.95$, $SD = .73$; low FTP: $M = 3.12$, $SD = .72$; $t(71) = 16.61$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 3.94$), but not in relation to their perceived social desirability (high FTP: $M = 4.30$, $SD = .86$; low FTP: $M = 4.47$, $SD = .76$; $t(71) = .91$, $p = ns$).

Discussion

The present results support our hypothesis about a social valorization of the high FTP target in both countries by showing that the FTP valorization is strongly anchored in the social utility dimension in Portugal as well as in Greece. Moreover, the two countries under analysis differed in their attribution of the two dimensions to the high or low FTP profiles: Greek participants differentiated the two targets only regarding their perceived social utility; while Portuguese participants differentiated the two targets regarding both social utility *and* desirability.

These findings suggest that Portuguese participants present an *additional* valorization of this target in terms of desirability. This result is not contradictory with our general hypothesis about the social utility value of FTP. According to Dubois and Beauvois (2005), normativity is primarily anchored in social utility but could be *additionally* linked to social desirability.

General Discussion

This research provides additional evidence on the FTP normative characteristics. The results obtained with these two traditional paradigms of social norms permit to consider that the ZTPI-FTP construct is normative in Greece and in Portugal. This construct was seen to be mobilized in the self-presentation strategies in evaluative contexts (Study 1), being also valued when participants were judging somebody else (Study 2), especially with respect to social utility. These results are consistent with previous findings concerning FTP normativity in the French context (Guignard et al., 2014).

Our consistent findings about FTP strong normativity in Portugal and Greece suggest that being oriented toward the future can be considered as a social norm (Dubois, 1994). The FTP construct is highly associated with the social utility value, which must be analyzed in the light of the social needs it satisfies. Social utility reflects the expectations of a given social group towards its members (Cambon, 2006). This was demonstrated here by the fact that the FTP construct is socially valued in *evaluative contexts* (when making professional self-presentations [Study 1] or when judging someone else [Study 2]) but is quite independent from *standard situations* (absence of relations between clear-sightedness and standard presentation - Study 1). It is therefore possible that this normative function of FTP only gains its full meaning when analyzed as part of a more general system of liberal and individualistic management that is deeply anchored in everyday activities and social practices. This justifies the interest in extending this type of analysis either to other countries that share the same ideological universe, but are not faced with a crisis situation (e.g. Nordic countries); or to other countries with different individualistic/collectivistic orientations (e.g. United States and Korea; Triandis, 1994).

This massive attribution of the social utility value brings FTP closer to the so-called utility-based judgment norms (Dubois & Beauvois, 2005). One crucial aspect of considering FTP as a social norm concerns the fact that it is socially learned. In this sense, Goula (2014)

demonstrated how, in Greece, children's FTP is affected by their parents' FTP orientation, showing the early social learning of this orientation toward the future. Moreover, social learning of FTP normativity seems to be deeply anchored in evaluative situations which require individual responsibility and social performances, as those implemented in our studies. Indeed, Beauvois (1984), in his analysis of the internality norm, observed that social actors (teachers, instructors, etc.) promote a prospective way of being and acting (i.e. to make plans and to be oriented to the future), given that nowadays, the individual is seen as the only responsible for his/her fate. Furthermore, the socio-normative dynamics revealed in our studies about the ZTPI-FTP construct (which mainly focused on planning, programming and anticipating dimensions) could be seen as related to the dominant model of thinking in terms of project, which is characteristic of the neo-liberal ideology in Western societies (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999).

Despite this overall high FTP valorization, the results of the present studies also suggest the existence of normative dynamics particular to each country. Study 1 results indicate that more Portuguese participants used FTP as a criterion for gaining either approval or disapproval. Also in the same direction, results of Study 2 indicate that different judgement dynamics take place in Portugal and in Greece. Portuguese participants valued the high-FTP target both in terms of social utility and desirability, while Greek participants valued it especially in terms of social utility. This bi-dimensional FTP valorization by Portuguese participants also helps us to understand why the FTP orientation in this context could be more used as a criterion for gaining approval than in the Greek context.

Results differentiating these two national contexts were not initially expected, considering the overall similar economical and budgetary situation of these two countries. Yet, these results may make sense in light of the social responses to the austerity measures that were imposed on the population by the governments of these two countries. For instance, the social

movements in Portugal were less reactive to the budgetary cuts than the social movements in Greece.

This comparison between Portugal and Greece suggests that specific socio-economical contexts might indeed reveal different FTP valorizations. A debate proposed at a similar level was carried out by Durante et al. (2013), who showed through an international analysis that in more egalitarian countries, social inequality is less 'justified' through compensatory attributions of warmth to social groups regarded as lower in competence (and social status). In this sense, a wider comparison between countries under austerity measures and other countries that, despite the crisis still present positive growth numbers, or that present different cultural characteristics (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010), would probably yield even more interesting insights about the societal function and the valorization of the FTP-orientation.

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