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Choice Under Uncertainty: The Settlement Decisions of Serbian Self-Initiated Expatriates in the United States

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study explores the settlement decisions of Serbian self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) in the United States.

Methodology: Using qualitative phenomenological inquiry, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 Serbian SIEs, and the data were analyzed through the framework analysis method. This explorative study focused on individual preferences and processes, social interac-

tions, and socio-economic environment through the concepts of decision theory, acculturation orientation, and transnational attachment.

Findings: Serbian SIEs were motivated to migrate to the United States for career opportunities, self-worth validation, departure from social norms placed by the Serbian society, and normal, happy lives. Their decisions to stay were deeply influenced by their family members, possible repatriation or further journey dependent on favorable opportunities at home, potential boredom with a current lifestyle, and intention to start a family. Serbian SIEs navigated the macro system based on knowledge gained through exploration and transnational networks. They chose the path of individualism and integration in terms of their acculturation orientation, which put them in balanced position for their own well-being. Serbian SIEs deliberately chose metropolitan areas, in which transnational attachments were fostered, and more opportunities arose.

Value added: Living in a culturally plural society has become a reality, leading to acculturation among migrants. If policy makers, hiring organizations, social service agencies, immigration officials, and law enforcement agencies understand why people choose to permanently relocate, they can also provide appropriate and relevant help in their adjustment challenges.

Recommendations: The research on migration and SIEs' decisions shows strong evidence that it relates to economic and professional gain as well as social networks and family ties; however, economic and social factors are not the only ones influencing migration decisions. Studies that call for both person- and institutional level are needed for deeper understanding of migration and settlement decisions as parameters exploring the consequences of immigration, crucial for the development of the intercultural management field. This way, both micro- and macro-level aspects would be equally highlighted, while meso-level information would serve for providing the connection between the two.

Key words: Acculturation, Decision-making, Expatriates, Migrants, Place Attachment, SIEs, Transnationalism

JEL codes: A13, D81, F22, F24, J11, J24, J61, J62

Introduction

Over 240 million people lived outside their country of birth in 2015 (United Nations Population Fund [UNPF], 2015). The number of tertiary educated migrants in developed countries showed an unprecedented increase in the past decade, surpassing 27 million in 2011 (United Nations [UN], 2013), thus

representing a significant pool of international human resources in the developed world (Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010). Living in a culturally plural society is becoming the reality, leading to acculturation among migrants (Berry, 2001; Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmand, Chasiots, & Sam, 2011; Carr, 2010; Sam & Berry, 2006). Much research is focused on refugees, expatriates, asylum seekers, immigrants, as well as various indigenous and ethnic groups (Berry et al., 2011). Topics such as voluntariness, geographical destinations, as well as the permanency of international migration have been extensively researched (Berry et al., 2011); however, the decisions that underlie possible permanent relocation of self-initiated expatriates, persons migrating on their own volition, with the legal decision of employment made by the new work contract partners (Andresen, Al Ariss, & Wahlter, 2012; Froese, 2012), from developing countries has not been sufficiently represented in research (Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010; Beitin, 2012; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010).
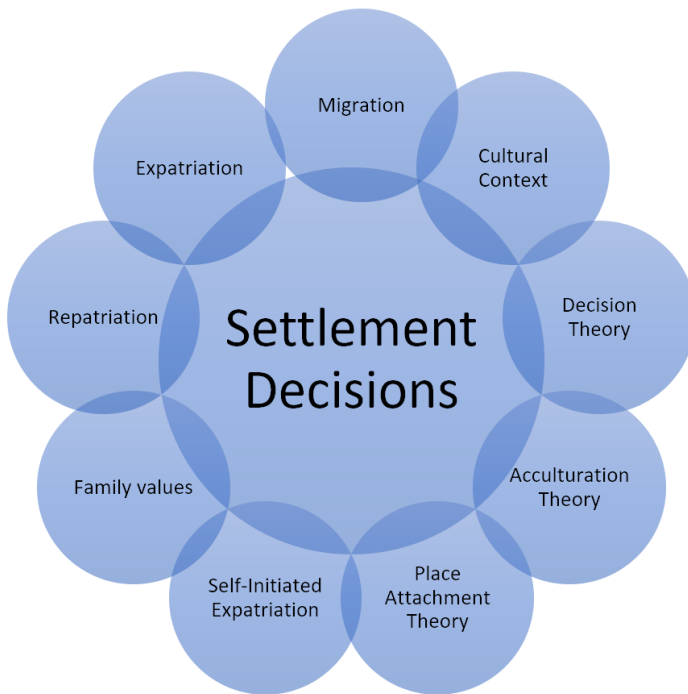
The people of Serbia have experienced high migration, both in and out of the country. This study focuses on Serbian self-initiated expatriates' (SIEs) migration decisions and the influences on their decision to stay in the United States or to leave, as well as on identifying the underlying reasons for those decisions. The World Economic Forum (WEF, 2015) recognized Serbia as one of the top 10 countries influenced by immense departure of skilled workers, thus leading to a 31% decline in the number of scientists and engineers (Pejin-Stokic & Grecic, 2012). The United States and Canada are favorite destinations for Serbian skilled workers (Bubalo-Zivkovic, Djercan, Lukic, & Jovanovic, 2014; Pejin-Stokic & Grecic, 2012; UN, 2013).

Migration (crossing national borders and changing a dominant place of residence, [UN, 1998]) brings both psychological (e.g., well-being, self-esteem) and sociocultural (e.g., relationships in daily life) adaptation matters to the surface (Berry et al., 2011). Under the acculturation umbrella (changes within as a result of contact with other cultural groups), the major focus of the field of intercultural psychology became what they eat, how they speak, dress, and cope with uncertainty as a result of contact with other cultural groups

(e.g., Berry, 1976; Berry, Kim, Mindle, & Mok, 1987; Froese, 2012; Roccas, Horenczyk, & Schwartz, 2000; Schiefer, Mollering, & Daniel, 2012). Issues such as home country politics, economy, and demographics together with the host country's immigration history, policies, and attitudes toward immigrants are equally significant dimensions in the lives of SIEs (Carr 2010; Sapienza, Hichy, Guarnera, & Di Nuovo, 2011; Selmer, 2010; Yijala, Lonnqvist, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Verkasalo, 2012). Potential conflicts or needed adjustment for meaningful living abroad emerge when examining similarities and differences between the host and home cultures (Grieger, 2008).

The purpose of this social constructivist phenomenological method of inquiry was to deepen the understanding of the decision-making process for relocation and possible settlement decisions of Serbian SIEs in the United States. The experience of settlement decisions was captured through in-depth exploration of the phenomenon, while the meaning was co-constructed with the participants through a social constructivism prism. The exploration of settlement decisions of SIEs was multifaceted: it included both SIEs' pre- and post-migration decisions, family values and life-style preferences, the new context, and SIEs' perception of career development opportunities. Consequently, this study addressed the main question: What is the dimensionality of Serbian self-initiated expatriates' settlement decisions in the United States?

Figure 1. Concept map illustrating relationships between the elements of the study

Source: generated by the author.

International migration research is dominated by the countries with the largest diasporas, globally: India, China, the Philippines, and Mexico (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2015; Massey et al., 1993; World Bank, 2011). The significance for the field of international psychology lies in the exploration of the consequences of migration while expanding the research on decision-making in migration. This inquiry adds to the growing literature on expatriation and repatriation by exploring the relationship of attitudes, beliefs, and values during the migration in the lives of expatriates from Serbia, with specific foci on Serbian SIEs. This research also clarifies the distinction and similarities between SIEs from developing and developed countries, thus contributing to the efforts of deeper understanding of the

individuals from the developing countries currently existing in the literature (Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010; Berry & Bell, 2012; Neault, 2014).

Materials & Methods

Exploring the relevant cultural context is central in conceptualizing participants' settlement decisions (Grieger, 2008). A context is considered as one of the highest orders in cross-cultural psychology (Berry et al., 1997; Berry et al. 2011). Understanding participants' cultural identity is crucial for any comprehensive understanding of the decisions made in life transitions, that is, SIEs' settlement decisions in the foreign country. Cultural similarity (or distance) plays a significant role in decision-making about the temporariness or permanency of stay in the host country (Black & Stephens, 1989; Bozionelos, 2009; Dorsch et al., 2013; Schiefer et al., 2012), and cultural factors are recognized as crucial in settlement decisions (Cedrin, 2013). Furthermore, a strong cultural identity that is linked with the quality of lifestyle is positively associated with repatriation (Gmelch, 1980; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010).

This researcher utilized Grieger's (2008) Cultural Assessment Interview Protocol (CAIP). Of the nine categories introduced in the CAIP, only five modified categories (e.g., terminology, application) were determined to be relevant for the decisional outcomes of Serbian SIEs: (1) Cultural Identity, (2) Level of Acculturation, (3) Family Structure and Expectations, (4) Experience with Bias and Immigration, and (5) Existential/Spiritual Issues. Other categories that are dealing with problem conceptualization and attitudes toward helping, as well as the part inquiring about the counselor's characteristics in the original interview protocol were omitted for being inadequate for the decision-making process related to expatriation of Serbians. This decision for questions to be modified was congruent with Grieger's (2008) suggestion for CAIP's implementation in which was stated that the questions needed not to be asked precisely as formulated or in the exact order. Furthermore, when using CAIP, Grieger (2008) asserted that not every question needed to be asked.

These interview questions were translated into Serbian using Brislin (1980) forward-backward translation procedure. While the interviews were conducted in Serbian, the researcher (a native Serbian, and bilingual in English) translated the collected data into English. Conducting a protocol interview in a native language of participants added another layer in constructed validity and made this inquiry more connected to the constructed reality of Serbian self-initiated expatriates.
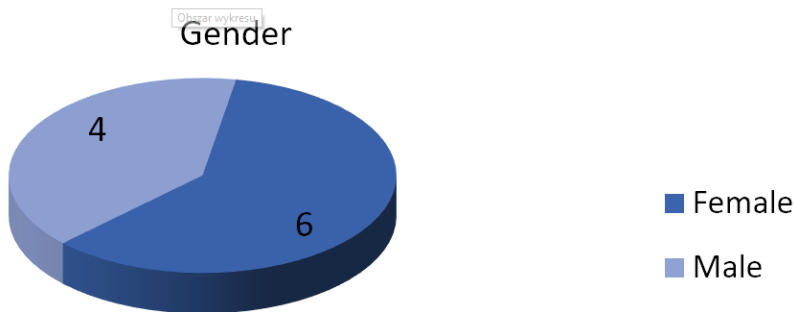
Phenomenology is strongly suggested for researches on relocating individuals as it is considered a life transition (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), particularly if conducted by researchers that have already experienced acculturation (Rudmin, 2010). As an immigrant from Serbia, living and working in the United States, the researcher has been deeply acculturated into this society while going back and forth between the known orientations of separation and integration. This research followed Moustakas' (1994) four-stage transcendental phenomenological methodology (i.e., epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, & synthesis of meanings), and through a constructivism prism, unfolded the essence and basic structure underlying Serbian SIEs' decisional outcomes.

Individuals construct their multiple realities through their lived experiences and interaction with others (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, a social constructivism approach helped in understanding the differences individuals created while belonging to both host and home cultures. This should not be confused with the ongoing assumption that acculturation characteristics could be assigned to certain cultural groups. Strategies employed in acculturation orientation were strictly seen on individual preferences of participants involved in this research (Demes & Geeraert, 2013; Rudmin, 2010). Consequently, when talking about the group, this research narrowed the meaning to shared ethnicity.

The participants in this study were ethnic Serbs, university graduates between the ages 25 and 48, who recently migrated to the United States (i.e., 2 years in the country). Ten participants (Figure 2) volunteered to take part in the research study (women = 6, men = 4). All participants elected to speak

in Serbian during the interviews. Also, all participants identified as Serbs of Orthodox Christian faith, born and raised in Serbia. Most participants in this study came to the U. S. with at least one member of their immediate family or were waiting for part of their families to join them in near future.

Figure 2. Gender representation

Source: generated by the author.

Table 1 represents SIEs' time spent in the U.S., their level of education, their profession, and the specific location of their current residence.

Table 1. Time in the U. S., Level of Education, Profession, and Current Location of Serbian SIEs

Participants' ID	Time in the U.S.	Education/Profession	Location
1	> 1 year	Graduate Degree *Orthodox Priest*	Illinois
2	< 1 year	Undergraduate Degree *Visual Artist*	Illinois
3	< 2 years	Undergraduate Degree *Graphic Designer*	Illinois
4	< 1 year	Graduate Degree *Performing Artist*	Florida
5	> 1 year	Undergraduate Degree *Performing Artist*	Florida
6	> 1 year	Undergraduate Degree *Applied Scientist*	Florida

7	> 1 year	Undergraduate Degree *Applied Scientist*	Florida
8	< 1 year	Undergraduate Degree *Computer Scientist*	Illinois
9	< 1 year	Undergraduate Degree *Attorney at Law*	New Jersey
10	< 2 years	Graduate Degree *Architect*	New Jersey

Source: generated by the author.

In the beginning of each interview, the researcher reminded the participants that the interview was confidential, and that no one would be able to connect the told stories with their identities. Before the semistructured interviews were conducted, the researcher asked participants to shortly describe their journey to the United States and made sure the interviewees understood the constructs and wordings used in the interview protocol. After a thorough clarification of the questions and the explanation of what the goal of this research was (i.e., the experience of the settlement decisions in the United States), the researcher proceeded with the segments of interviews. The data collected from these 10 participants were included in the data analysis.

Current State of Knowledge

The reports from the United Nation Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Population Division (UNDESAPD, 2011) and from the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2014) stated that there was an unprecedented increase of international mobility in the past decade (currently over 240 million people live outside their place of birth), of which the migration from developing to developed regions is projected to rise even more in the next 40 years (UNDESAPD, 2011). Of those, SIEs play a significant role as human resources in developed countries (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013). Not only they contribute to the labor force as experts, but they also cost less than more

traditional expatriates on many levels, notably on the salaries, taxation, living and travel costs, among the other things (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013).

The International Management (IM) field is contributing to the stereotyping in the way that it describes the SIEs as capable of strategically advancing careers and successfully integrating in the host country (with many more positive aspects attributed to their international mobility), while migrants as those lacking the skills and qualifications that could be transferred across countries (Al Ariss, 2012). These results were due to the lack of focus on SIEs from developing countries because the majority of the findings are based on exchanges between countries in the developed world (Al Ariss, 2010; Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010). What is lacking in literature is the exploration of career experiences of SIEs from developing countries that directly influence SIEs decisions to settle or repatriate. Furthermore, it is often neglected that SIEs from developing countries face more governmental obstacles in getting their visas and working permits, which creates further obstacles in the settlement decisions (Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010). While some would disagree that the topic is in its infancy, the SIEs have been buried for years under the research on expatriates, assigned expatriates (AE), qualified immigrants (QI), and under the international mobility umbrella (Cerdin, 2013).

The migration process may provoke both personal growth and development, and physical and psychological distress (Roccas et al., 2000). In this process, one can change the perception of self (e.g., lower self-esteem), which also could influence the sense of well-being when related to acculturation adjustment process (Roccas et al., 2000). Core aspects of acculturation process are explaining changes in cultural groups and individuals that are happening as a result of contacts with other cultural groups (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 2011). It is essential to keep individual and group levels of acculturation process distinct because human behavior interacts with cultural and ecological contexts. While behavioral adjustment can reflect the objective expectations of the host country, behavioral change happens with the perception of expectations of the host country as well. These concerns bring

the issues of values related to home country, negotiation with the values of host country, the sense of well-being to the forefront of research on expats and repats, as well as the strength of ties among the aforementioned issues.

Additionally, a cross-border connection between societies through individuals and communities (i.e., transnationalism) focuses on relations, exchanges, and practices, consequently surpassing home and host countries as the principal location for identities and activities (IOM, 2010). Maintained and established socio-cultural and border-crossing connections are central concepts of transnational identity (Vertovec, 2004). For these practices and relationships linking migrants with their place of origin to be considered under the transnationalism umbrella, they need to have a significant meaning and be regularly observed (Smith, 2006). Thus, the concept of transnationalism encompasses numerous ties and interactions that are connecting people and institutions away from the place of origin (Vertovec, 1999).

According to Pejin-Stokic and Grecic (2012) and Bubalo-Zivkovic et al. (2014), the United States and Canada are the most popular destinations for highly educated individuals from Serbia. The adjustment to the new country depends on the geographic interests (Froese, 2012), as well as on the family ties and social networks the migrant is capable of developing in the host country (Richardson & McKenna, 2014). Diversity, sociocultural, and sociopolitical migration present socioeconomic aspects as well (Carr, 2010). Language fluency is a central factor for the expatriates' favorable adaptation in the new country (Andresen, Al Ariss, & Walther, 2013; Froese, 2012; Goodwin, Polek & Bardi, 2012).

Serbia has a high percentage of unemployment, causing an economic recession. More than 10% of the population lives below the poverty line (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2013). The lack of employment opportunities pushes youth to relocate to developed countries in search of better lives, leaving the vast number of single-member households. Serbia has experienced a high percentage of *brain-drain* (loss of highly trained people), and with the issues of corruption in government in the transitioning

society, there is no solution for the reversal of this trend (Gabrity-Molnar, 2008; IMO, 2010). In sum, the research on SIEs from developing countries is limited (Al Ariss, 2010; Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010; Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013) and the Serbian perspective is virtually nonexistent. There is still a lack of information about how decisions are made to stay or leave influenced acculturation adjustment among expatriates (Berry et al., 2011; Bochner, 2006) and what the underlying reasons of those decisional outcomes would be. This research sheds light on distinctively Serbian perspectives while respecting the uniqueness of each individual, as well as on other Eastern European countries that share similar home-country circumstances and culture, representing roughly 10% of international migration labor (IOM, 2015).

Due to Serbia's slow assimilation into the world community (i.e., recent political unrest, past civil wars), many are relocating of their own volition as opposed to being transferred by their employers, thus being classified as self-initiated expatriates. It is not clear if these individuals made a decision to permanently relocate or just temporarily settle in a developed country, and it is believed that the majority leaves without clear plans for the future (Pejin-Sto-kic & Grecic, 2012). There is inconsistency in the literature in the distinction between how skilled workers from the developing and developed countries are named. Therefore, one of the main parameters in classifications could be expatriates' decision-making process or their own understanding of reality.

Results

The participants in this study came from several different generations and had somewhat different experiences in and out of the country of origin. They were all professionals in the various fields of arts, humanities, social, and natural sciences. All of them were employed in Serbia before coming to the US; in fact, the majority had well-paid jobs for the circumstances, and enjoyed favorable statuses (respected positions of well-educated individuals) in the society. For example, Hoppe and Fujishiro (2015) mentioned that while

unemployment is positively associated with migration decisions, it does not predict it, and it is most likely because individuals lack the economic power to pursue migration. On the other side, anticipated career benefits and career aspiration are associated with all migration decision-making phases (Froese, 2012; Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015).

Migration involves decisions about living arrangements and is dependent on an individual's perception of possibilities and limitations in their given situation, in accordance with current beliefs. In literature, migration decision-making is divided into a three-stage model, and while it varies from researcher to researcher, it divides into desire, concrete intention, and the action of moving (Brown & Moore, 1970; Kley & Mulder, 2010; Speare et al., 1975). When in the early stage of migration decision-making, the research shows that once certain behavior has been made, people will stick to its realization, and the individuals will do whatever it takes to make those goals attainable (Kley & Mulder, 2010). The initial stage is mostly influenced by the perceived better life at the new location, which is also compared to a rational decision, the one that exists only if the idea of an alternative exists (Kley & Mulder, 2010; Speare, 1971), and previous relocation experiences highly enhances the probability to migrate because that alternative is rather real for them.

During the process of manual coding, the researcher recognized the push and pull factors influencing the settlement decisions, as well as the influence of family ties and established and maintained social connections. Certain passages related to the acculturation process, and participants' acculturation orientation in the new society (e.g., "America is a very open country, and accepting of diverse cultures," participant 7). Nuclear and extended family were inseparable from participants' settlement decisions, together with their social networks (e.g., "I don't think I would ever be able to go through this process solely by myself," participant 9). Besides choices made to benefit participants' careers, their spirituality created a safety net during their transitions in the new society, both reflecting on the acculturative integrationist strategies, as well as their transnational attachments (Rishbeth, 2014; Sapienza et al.,

2010). Once essence was captured in the first cycle of the coding process, value codes were capturing the similarities among the participants' answers, their different takes on the subjects, frequency, and sequence.

In addition, in the second cycle of coding through computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS), in this case Dedoose software, the data were able to generate meaningful units, also known as categories: (a) culture fabric, (b) letdowns, (c) deprivation, (d) abundance, and (e) transnationalism. These categories were a result of 17 different codes, clustered statements generating meaning units (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2016). This proceeded to charting and summarizing, in which largely descriptive narrations became categories, leading to the main themes of the research. Table 2 represents the breakdown of aforementioned codes and categories with verbatim statements.

Table 2. Codes, Categories (Meaning Units), and Evidence

Codes	Categories	Evidence
1. Acculturation 2. Language 3. Tradition 4. Cultural identity 5. Cultural divergence	Cultural Fabric	*America is the only country in which one doesn't feel like a second-class citizen, as one would be in Europe…this is an immigrants' country, and generations and generations got used to live with immigrants, and the (American's) see no problem in it* (Participant 8) *If I cannot express what I feel, then I cannot be what I am* (Participant 8) *We worked in the housekeeping first* (Participant 8) *I am proud to be Serbian…we are intelligent, humorous…we are special!* (Participant 4) *We are a closed society and quite traditional…almost primitive. Although, life is different in the metro areas…here, I am sometimes ashamed of our people* (Participant 5)
6. Lost values 7. Disappointments 8. Discrimination 9. Corruption	Letdowns	*I think that that beauty, where you could build and live and enjoy life disappeared over years…it simply doesn't exist there anymore* (Participant 6) *Unfortunately, I finished my school there, believed in my country, thought I could do some good there…and it hurt when I was leaving* (Participant 2) *Very intolerant to differences* (Participant 10) *Under what circumstances? I will be old when that (return) happens* (Participant 2)

10.Expatriation/im-migration 11. Uncertainty/immi-gration 12. Tough life home	Deprivation	*Bad financial situation in country made me relocate* (Participant 7) *There is a fear of losing a job there, and that makes people miserable* (Partici-pant 8) *Just because we've experienced sanc-tions, and crisis, deterioration of our country, and the bombing, and witness-es of nowadays migrants' crisis* (Partic-ipant 1)
13. Better life 14. Happiness 15. Self-acceptance & personal growth 16. Settlement/immi-gration	Abundance	*I saw myself with a wonderful job in future, and thought I would find it here, and when compared to Serbia, this job would be aligned with my expertise* (Participant 6) *Life filled with comfort, very relaxed, laid back. Life without any big ambi-tions, God forbid. Only one decent, normal life. To have enough money for normal things, and for me to be happy. Yes, to be happy…and the life as such is perfect for me* (Participant 4) *I came as a very important person, and then understood it was not important at all…self-confrontation is pushing your own boundaries* (Participant 5) *I would love to have my base here, and to go there very frequently* (Participant 8)
17. Family ties/net-works	Transnationalism	*I maintain those relationships to the maximum. Feels like we all live togeth-er…we are lucky for having the internet* (Participant 6) *They will come. I go there frequently, every 6 months. They're all there, no one is here* (Participant 4) *We communicate regularly, and know everything that happens. Sometimes I feel bad that cannot help immediately, but I don't feel separated. For now, they expect financial help from me as well* (Participant 8)

Source: generated by the author.

Table 3 represents the main themes inspired by meaning units, with decisional dimensions: (a) from culture to acculturation and back, (b) values

(or the lack thereof), (c) lack of (job) opportunities in Serbia, (d) limitless opportunities in the United States, and (e) transnational attachments. The main themes were decided by the researcher to be the most indicative of participants' settlement decisions. By devising and refining the newfound framework, this qualitative research was heading toward mapping of polarities (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, 2002), thus reflecting on the unique experience of migration decisions in this study.

Table 3. Master Table of Themes

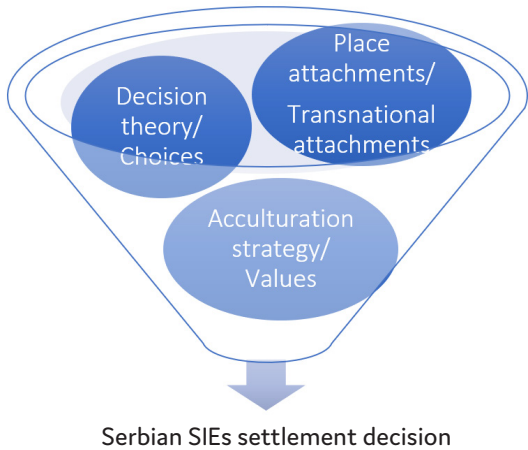| Themes Present	Motivations
From Culture to Acculturation & Back	Push & Pull
Values (or lack thereof)	Push & Pull
Lack of (job) Opportunities in Serbia	Push
Limitless Opportunities in the U. S.	Pull
Transnational Attachments	Push & Pull

Source: generated by the author.

These themes were analyzed against the settlement decision intentions and grouped in the well-established push and pull models (Berry et al., 2011; Froese, 2012) influencing migration decisions: the lost values, lack of opportunities in Serbia as the negative push factors, the transnational attachments as both the push and the pull factors, while from culture to acculturation and back and limitless opportunities in the U.S. were seen as the positive pull factors. This led to the imaginative variation and synthesis of meaning, the last 2 stages of the transcendental phenomenological analysis by Moustakas (1994), in which reflections on the main themes are presented together with their relationship with the goal of this study.

Implications

As a part of a three-partite conceptual framework (Figure 3), decision theory creates a good platform for understanding a person-situation interaction, which is the growing body of theoretical accounts of self-initiated expatriates' decisional outcomes and acculturative adjustment (Berry et al., 2011; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). SIEs make decisions based on their perception of the host country's acculturation orientation, their own acculturation strategy preferences, and the objective constraints that any given situation presents (Carr 2010; Sapienza et al., 2010; Selmer, 2010; Yijala et al., 2012). Lastly, the social constructivist phenomenological approach facilitates a more thorough understanding of the influence of context and structure on the individual (Frisbie, 1984; Judson, 1990), a missing piece in current research on SIEs (Al Ariss, 2010). The deliberate choice of a place to migrate is not only tied to career opportunities, but also to social networks/capital and family ties (Achenbach, 2017; Kritz & Zlotnik, 1992; Massey, 1999), and particular place of attachment, an emotional bond between people and a particular place or environment (Altman & Low, 1992; Gmelch, 1980; Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014).

Figure 3. Conceptual framework analysis

Serbian SIEs settlement decision

Source: generated by the author.

This phenomenological inquiry revealed several different aspects of the old migration narrative known as the "better-life quest." Serbian SIEs motives to move to the United States were for career opportunities, self-worth validation, departure from social norms placed by the Serbian society, and normal, happy lives. Their decisions to stay were deeply influenced by their family members, and possible repatriation or further journey reliant on favorable opportunities at home (socio-economic and ethical values), possible boredom with a current lifestyle, and a decision to start a family. Starting a family is a reason to settle for some, while for others a reason to repatriate. Table 4 represents the summary of the most salient dimensions and how they relate to migration, settlement, and repatriation decisions.

Table 4. Dimensions Influencing Migration, Settlement, and Repatriation Decisions

Serbian SIEs Dimensions	Migration Decisions	Settlement Decisions	Repatriation Decisions
Values	Deteriorated	Choice	If restored
Economy	Deprivation	Abundance	If changed
Validation	Lacking	Plenty	Lost cause
Happiness	Searching	Creating	Family/Friends
Institutions	Corrupted	Transparent	If accountable
Family	Support	Support/Transnationalism	Transnationalism
Social capital	Losing it	Creating new/Utilizing	Nostalgia
Acculturation	Early start	Integration/Diversity	Separation

Source: generated by the author.

As indicated in Table 4, deteriorated values influenced SIEs' migration decisions, freedom of choice influenced their settlement decisions, and for them to repatriate, those fundamental values would have to be restored.
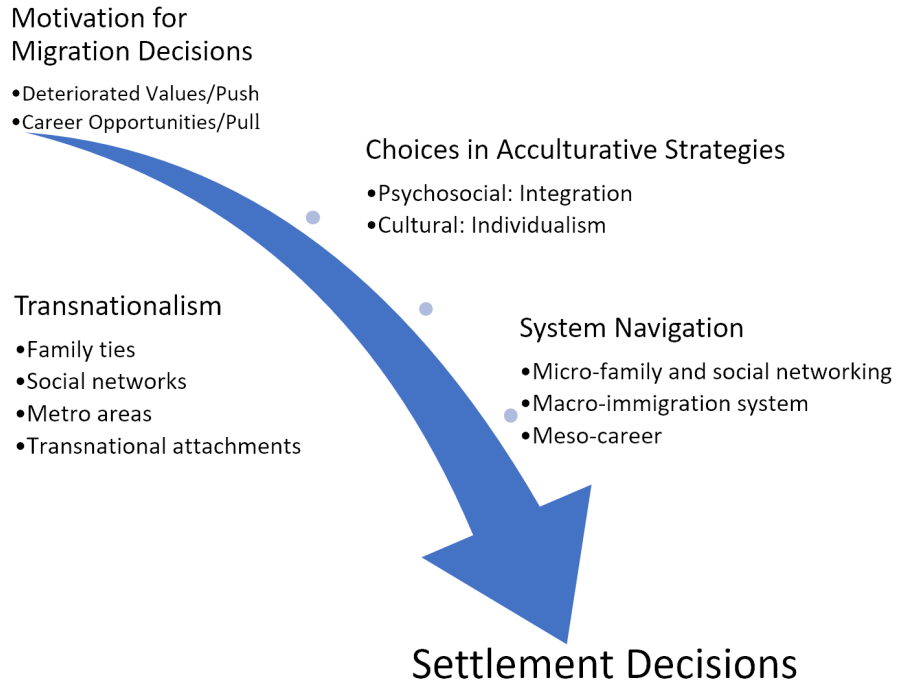
The themes that emerged in this inquiry shed light on migration decisions of Serbian self-initiated expatriates in which they revealed that both push and pull factors are equal drivers behind those decisions. This is essential, because both migration and IM literature place pull factors as more critical (Berry et al., 2011; Froese, 2012). While Serbian SIEs could not bear the effects of corroded society and the lack of career opportunities, the majority was attracted by limitless career opportunities, and freedom of choice to live without judgment by others, as they perceive the life is in the United States. Their decisions came after careful deliberation and exploration of options. Many of them spent some time to gain the knowledge about their opportunities, and only after connecting with their transnational networks, they started creating their transnational attachments.

When looked through purely cognitive-affective lens, this is where the differences between individuals are the most highlighted. Those Serbian SIEs that ran away from the lifestyle seem not to have a clear picture of what their future is going to look like, while those that pursued their careers already had their long-term plans strategized. This is corroborated in literature in terms of success in expatriation adjustment, where cognitive motivation is positively associated with better coping skills (Froese, 2012; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Selmer & Lauring, 2013).

Lastly, when encountering Serbian SIEs, it is crucial to understand their family values, and how much they influence their decisions. Family is vital for their well-being, and this is relevant information for social policy makers, as well as for the organizations hiring these individuals. Their preferred contacts in the host country are family and social networks. To advance their careers, they go through the complicated immigration system. There is a financial strain if family members are not allowed to work or when separated, in which the whole family suffers. By helping them to successfully navigate the macro system, they could alleviate the pressure these individuals experience.

Figure 4 presents the multidimensional process in Serbian SIEs migration decisions derived from the data, in which family plays a central role in decisions, and values together with the career opportunities are the main motivators. They navigate the macro system based on knowledge gained through exploration and transnational networks. They have chosen the path of individualism and integration in terms of their acculturation orientation, which puts them in balanced position for their well-being. Serbian SIEs deliberately choose metropolitan areas, in which transnational attachments are fostered, and more opportunities arise.

Figure 4. Settlement decisions as a multidimensional process emerged from data

Motivation for Migration Decisions

- Deteriorated Values/Push
- Career Opportunities/Pull

Choices in Acculturative Strategies

- Psychosocial: Integration
- Cultural: Individualism

Transnationalism

- Family ties
- Social networks
- Metro areas
- Transnational attachments

System Navigation

- Micro-family and social networking
- Macro-immigration system
- Meso-career

Settlement Decisions

Source: generated by the author.

Strengths of Study

One of the strengths of this study is the inclusion of SIEs from the develop-ing country. Not only that it furthers the SIEs scholarship, but it also fills the gap. The need for inclusiveness is well documented in the literature body (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Beitin, 2012; Berry & Bell, 2012), and this study helps in provision of insights about underrepresented SIEs. Furthermore, it includes strategies for analysis from several different angles, including both the migration and the SIE literature (Al Ariss, 2010). While it deepens the un-derstanding of the migration decision phenomenon, it also adds the value in its triangulated approach, in which information is derived from three-par-tite theoretical platform (decision theory, acculturation process, and place

attachment theory), literature that included both empirical and theoretical findings, together with the reports of prominent research organizations on migration (IOL, 2014; IOM, 2010; UN 2013), as well as direct voices of Serbian SIEs. Lastly, an insider's perspective was highlighted by researcher's shared cultural background with the participants.

Limitations of Study

One of the limitations is the recall bias, something out of the researcher's control (Simon, 2011). While participants migrated to the United States recently, they might have changed the initial migration intention (e.g., influenced by their current living conditions), which would result in omitted actions when recalling experiences and decisions. Another limitation of this research was the inability to interview participants prior to their migration so the level of congruency values could not be assessed. Also, while the bracketing took place throughout this inquiry, and the openness to participants' constructed realities was nurtured, the interviewers' shared cultural background might have affected the study. Lastly, the pool of participants only consisted of recent migrants to the United States, and the research clearly shows that the length of stay influences both the adjustment and the decision-making (Froese, 2012; Gmelch, 1979).

Final Remarks

To better understand self-initiated expatriation from developing to developed countries and their decisional outcomes, additional similar studies need to be conducted. Furthermore, those studies need not only to be larger in scope, but also longitudinal. This way, the dual nature of migration will be captured more comprehensively. It is critical to grasp both pre- and post-migration experiences. Furthermore, the triangulation in research methods is warranted (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013). Following this strategy, the information is

collected by different methods (e.g., mixed-methods approach) lessening the limitations of single-method biases while increasing the understanding of a given phenomenon (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Creswell, 2013).

Another recommendation would be in the direction of connecting and relating immigration and self-initiated expatriation (Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010; Berry & Bell, 2012). There is a disconnection between these concepts, and this seems to come from fear of equalization of migrants and SIEs for the benefit of newer concept in migration concerning SIEs research (Doherty et al., 2013). Instead, the body of literature should embrace both sides, and transfer the knowledge that would benefit both ends of the scientific research. Somewhere in the middle lies the context of migration from developing and developed countries, and while the body of research slowly acknowledges specific situations pertinent for this group of participants, it deserves a much larger attention, because SIEs from developing world are valuable alternative to corporate expatriation (Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010; Bonache & Zarraga-Oberty, 2008). This would also help immigration policymaking in the exploration of these linkages. Not only would it benefit both host and home countries to successfully cope with migration, but it also would help migrants and SIEs in utilizing their skills to its full capacity (Achenbach, 2017).

Serbian emigration exploded in the past decade, especially amongst the highly skilled individuals in various professions (Gabrity-Molnar, 2008; Grecic & Pejin-Stokic, 2012; IOM, 2010). This was partially influenced by the global change of needed migrants, where those with higher expertise were also more welcomed in the developed countries (Gabrity-Molnar, 2008; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). This was also due to the lack of international trade and competitiveness of developing countries. These types of studies should initiate further talk about countries in question and their developing strategies in how to attract their intellectual force back within the borders of their country, or appeal to other highly skilled migrants. This problem is not limited to developing countries. It is rather an issue with global proportions, where the actions of developed countries directly influence transitioning so-

cieties. Relying on remittances should not be an international trade strategy, and future research should also focus on how that influx of money could be used for repatriates that would like to invest in their countries for any reason, be it patriotic, individual, or community oriented (Achenbach, 2017; Gmelch, 1980; IOM, 2010).

Lastly, the research on migration and SIEs' decisions shows strong evidence that it relates to economic and professional gain (Froese, 2012; Massey et al., 1993; Selmer & Lauring, 2013) as well as social networks and family ties (Achenbach, 2017; Kritz & Zlotnik, 1992; Massey, 1999); however, economic and social factors are not the only ones influencing migration decisions (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015). Studies that call for both person- and institutional level are needed for deeper understanding of migration and settlement decisions as parameters exploring the consequences of immigration, crucial for the development of the international psychology field. This way, both micro- and macro-level aspects would be equally highlighted, while mezzo-level information would serve for providing the connection between the two.

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