

Mina Petrović¹

University of Belgrade

Faculty of Philosophy

Original scientific paper
UDK 314.74:[316.42:711.432(497.11 Beograd)"]20"

316.728:316.644–057.56–058.13(497.11 Beograd)

Submitted: 16.10.2020

Accepted: 1.12.2020.



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2298/SOC2004549P>

WHETHER TRANSNATIONAL MIDDLE-CLASS MIGRANTS PERCEIVE BELGRADE AS AN ATTRACTIVE AND COMFORTABLE CITY²

Da li transnacionalni migranti srednje klase doživljavaju Beograd kao atraktivan i udoban grad

ABSTRACT: The research focus is on whether transnational middle-class migrants perceive Belgrade as a city suitable for their way of life. At the outset, the analytical framework links the social production of contemporary cities to processes of globalization and transnational migration, with a focus on post-socialist cities and Belgrade as the object of empirical research. The second part of the paper contains data analysis based on the 21 semi-structured interviews with middle-class transnational migrants who had lived and worked in Belgrade for at least a year at the time of the interviews, conducted in late 2018 and early 2019. The analysis focuses on the opinions of transnational migrants regarding housing and working conditions in Belgrade in comparison to their previous experiences; on daily routines and practices they can or cannot realize in Belgrade; and on the importance they attach to globally standardized places (such as international cafes, restaurants, shopping malls, etc.) as compared to locally specific equivalents. In the concluding section, seeking to examine whether the Belgrade entrepreneurial urban policy meets the expectations of these transnational actors, the key research findings are summarized in a manner accordant with the inputs they could provide for Belgrade's urban development.

KEY WORDS: *Belgrade, social production of space, transnational migrants, city, urban policy*

APSTRAKT: *Osnovno analitičko pitanje je da li transnacionalni migranti srednje klase percipiraju Beograd kao grad koji odgovara njihovom načinu života. U prvom*

1 mipetrov@f.bg.ac.rs

2 This paper results from the work on the project Challenges of the new social integration in Serbia – concepts and actors (ev. No 179035), funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

delu rada, predstavljen je analitički okvir kojim se povezuje društvena produkcija savremenih gradova sa procesima globalizacije i transnacionalnih migracija, sa naglaskom na post-socijalističke gradove i Beograd kao predmet empirijskog istraživanja. U drugom delu rada, predstavljena je analiza podataka prikupljenih na osnovu 21 polustrukturisanog intervjua sa transnacionalnim migrantima srednje klase koji su u vreme istraživanja živeli u Beogradu najmanje godinu dana. Intervjui su obavljani krajem 2018. godine i početkom 2019. godine. Analiza obuhvata mišljenje transnacionalnih migranata o stambenim i radnim uslovima koje imaju u Beogradu u poređenju sa njihovim prethodnim iskustvom, o dnevnim rutinama i praksama koje mogu ili ne mogu da realizuju u Beogradu, kao i značaju koji daju globalno standardizovanim mestima u poređenju sa lokalno specifičnim. U zaključnom odeljku rada nalazi istraživanja su sumirani tako da ukazu da li preduzetnička urbana politika Beograda odgovara očekivanjima transnacionalnih aktera i kakve bi, u tom smislu, mogle biti preporuke za budući razvoj Beograda.

KLJUČNE REČI: *Beograd, društvena produkcija prostora, transnacionalni migranti, grad, urbana politika*

Introduction

The opening analytical question – whether transnational middle-class migrants perceive Belgrade as a city suitable to their way of life – is conceptualized, on the one hand, through ideas on the social production of modern cities as attractive places for transnational capital and migrants and, on the other, through the position of transnational migrants as users of these globalizing cities. The study of the relationship between urban development processes and middle-class migration is a rather new topic in urban and migration studies, particularly in the context of post-socialist cities. The new mobile paradigm emerging in urban sociology has encouraged attempts to bridge an agency-focused perspective pertaining to day-to-day production of space and more macro-level approaches. Following that logic, the first section links Lefebvre's ideas of the social production of space, as guiding thoughts on contemporary cities, to ideas inspired by Bourdieu's concept of habitus in urban studies research. The most relevant ideas for our analysis are those that show, on the one hand, how transnational actors reflexively judge the suitability of a particular city through the performance of everyday life – potentially resulting in them feeling comfortable there – and, on the other, how in their attempts to create an adequate opportunity structure for mobile transnational actors, cities should provide both sufficient predictability (through certain global standards) and attractive local differences. Although research on middle-class transnational migrants indicates that these expatriates are not primarily looking for a global sense of place and thus that they support the glocalization process, many cities, especially the less developed and peripheral, embrace urban entrepreneurialism to attract multinational capital and transnational actors and, in the process, become overly homogenised and standardised. As the historical and institutional

background of a city plays a crucial role in designing opportunity structure for mobile transnational actors, the outlined analytical framework also contains some relevant contextual information about post-socialist cities in general and about Belgrade specifically as the object of the empirical part of the study. The second part of the paper presents data from explorative research on middle-class transnational migrants' perceptions of Belgrade. Based on 21 semi-structured interviews conducted in late 2018 and early 2019, the analysis aims to answer the extent to which Belgrade's opportunity structure corresponds to the needs and way of life of transnational middle-class migrants and to ascertain whether these actors support the glocalization of Belgrade. The concluding section outlines why Belgrade's opportunity structure prevents transnational middle-class migrants from fully satisfying their needs and practicing the way of life they are used to in other cities, although it is worth mentioning that they do appreciate the city's welcoming atmosphere. From the respondents' point of view, the development of Belgrade's urban policy should focus more on glocal strategic thinking contrary to what is currently an over-prioritization of globally standardized flagship projects. It should also pay more attention to sustainable improvements of the city's image by increasing the general quality of urban services and infrastructure.

Social Production of Contemporary Cities and the Transnational Middle-Class Perspective

Some of the Lefebvre's most influential ideas in contemporary urban studies indicate that space is continuously modified, planned and designed by society but also that it defines the conditions for social action or possibilities for social behaviour, and thus helps to define society itself (Lefebvre, 1991). Following Lefebvre, Raffestin and Butler (2012) referred to the process of territorialisation as an extremely dynamic way of adapting territory (or space) to social changes (and vice versa). Similarly to Lefebvre's idea of an abstract space subordinated to the global capitalist market, these authors also pointed to globalization as a tremendous accelerator of social transformation, speeding up the process of territorialisation and suppressing the role of (local) culture in social appropriation of space, thus reducing territory (space) to a commodity (Raffestin and Butler, 2012:131). Accordingly, much urban research has focused on how cities are becoming globally homogenised and standardised, McDonaldised or even locally decontextualized in order to attract multinational capital and transnational actors (Parnreiter, 2012). However, the new mobile paradigm in urban sociology has increased an ambition to shed more light on the aspect of agency in day-to-day production of space, rather than continuing to understand it predominantly as a macro-level process driven by the global political economy (Sheller, 2017:631). In view of that, Smith has introduced the term transnational urbanism as a metaphor for processes through which transnational actors change the way we understand "place," "locality," and "the urban" (Smith, 2005:91). In this regard, transnationalism indicates the increased movement of individuals

in the contemporary world without ignoring the continued significance of place (Collins, 2009: 840).

The perspective of middle-class transnational migrants presents a relatively new field of study as, until recently, urban and migration studies were mainly focused on corporate elites and low income labour migrants or asylum-seekers (Smith and Favell, 2006:2). In urban studies, research focused on upper- and middle-class migrants contributed to the establishment of links between Bourdieu's notion of habitus and ideas on the social production of space. Therefore, due to the higher education, expertise, hyper-mobility and transnational careers of these transnational migrants (Beverstock, 2005), their experience of mobility is perceived as a route towards distinction, with leading world cities being their preferred destinations. At the same time, the identity of these transnational actors is conceived as contextual but not radically discontinuous, in line with recognition that habitus is in process, mutable and adaptable (Hillier and Rooksby, 2005:13–15). Consequently, previously inhabited localities are perceived as important in searching for places that reflect the habitus and values of transnational migrants and support everyday practices they have developed accordingly (Scott, 2006, Buhr, 2018). Thus, it could be said that transnational actors reflexively judge the suitability of a particular city, negotiate the context and position themselves at the intersections of geographical and social space (Benson, 2014:3100). Savage et al. (2005) claimed that Bourdieu's attention to feeling comfortable in place came from recognition that habitus, as embodied dispositions, is necessarily territorially located. Accordingly, speaking of a mobile middle class in general (not only transnational) they use the term performativity, in order to point to the capacity of this class to choose locations where the available social fields reflected in housing, education, consumption infrastructure, etc., fit as closely as possible to their habitus. In cases when they do not feel that the city adequately reflects their sense of themselves, they do not adopt it as an appropriate place for long-term relocation (Savage et al, 2005:35, 53–54). Similarly, Preece (2019: 830–831) points out that, through the performance of everyday life, transnational actors engage in a process by which they come to embody understandings of how to live in a certain city and (potentially) create a sense of feeling right in a particular place.

In view of that, the historical and institutional background of a particular city plays a crucial role in designing an adequate (or inadequate) opportunity structure for mobile transnational actors (Smith, 2005). In order to allow transnational actors with hyper-mobile international careers to extend their habitats from world cities to other locations, cities seek to create the conditions that support their performativity or, in other words, their practical competences to successfully cope with frequent changes of residence. In striving to achieve that aim, cities go through significant transformations with regard to their labour market, housing, education, service provision, infrastructures and quality of life. Research on the relationship between urban development processes and middle-class migration recognise that these expatriates are not primarily searching for social and cultural homogeneity, but that they tend to settle in a dispersed way and merge with the local population (Plöger and Becker, 2015;

Glick-Schiller, 2012). In that sense, transnational middle-class migrants could be seen as supporters of the glocalization process (Maslova and Chiodelli 2018:209); a process that stresses both heterogeneity and homogeneity as possible outcomes of the global-local interplay (Robertson, 1995) in refashioning urban space. This means that cities should provide transnational middle-class migrants both with sufficient predictability or global sense of place (for consistency with their previous experience, presuming certain global standards) and with attractive (local) differences, thus allowing them to practice the global in the local, and vice versa (Massey, 2004).

For post-socialist cities attempting to become attractive for transnational capital and upper/middle-class transnational actors, the risk of suppressing the specifics of local culture is rather high. From the perspective of the First World urban development model, these cities were seen both as lagging behind in developmental terms and as deviators from 'normal' economic relations of the capitalism. They were thus expected to gradually catch up with the market economy and adapt to global connectivity and competitiveness in the post-socialist period (Ferenčuhová and Gentile, 2016:4). Therefore, in the absence of any wider alternative options, these cities have embraced urban entrepreneurialism and neoliberal discourse (Liviú and Druŕăă, 2016:538). Less diversity and a lower quality of urban services and infrastructure inherited from the socialist period³ put these cities at high risk of importing cultural globalism and reproducing globally standardised flagship projects marked by similar architectural forms and design. In addition, an overt dominance of private interests over a weak public sector (Lauermann, 2018; Nedučin and Krklješ, 2017) hampers improvements to the general quality of urban services and infrastructure since the benefits of entrepreneurial policy cannot be adequately distributed without socially progressive policies (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Consequently, post-socialist cities, especially those without a rich and well-known cultural and historical tradition, appear less attractive to transnational upper and middle-class migrants and develop as less important hubs in the European city network.

Catching up with modern European capitals has been a constant goal of Belgrade's development as a city since its first urban plan was published in 1867. The most recent Regional Spatial Plan for the City of Belgrade defines as a special developmental task to, "elevate the City of Belgrade to a high ranking level among the metropolitan cities and the capitals of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe" (Official Gazette of the City of Belgrade 2015: 21). To accomplish this goal, priority is given to flagship projects, preferably developed by world famous architects such as Daniel Libeskind, Jan Gehl, Zaha Hadid, etc. An ambitious ongoing flagship project, the Belgrade Waterfront (BW), is implemented as a joint venture between a United Arab Emirates-based investor and the Republic of Serbia. It completely neglects local urban planning procedures, subordinates production of urban space to the interests of private investors and forces repetitive

3 Szelenyi (1996) outlined less urbanism (less diversity and marginality) and less economising of space (neglecting the rent mechanism) as distinguishing features of the socialist city in comparison to its capitalist counterpart.

and serial reproduction of global waterfront development patterns without taking into account local specifics (infrastructure, culture, etc.) (Koelemaj and Janković, 2019, Backović, 2019). In this respect, BW confirms the practice of investor-led urbanism in Belgrade (Petovar, 2006; Vujović and Petrović, 2007; Petrović, 2009) and shows that Belgrade's urban policy fits into a wider global trend of 'city entrepreneurialism'. The ongoing touristification (concentration of attractive facilities) of central city locations also strives to beautify Belgrade in accordance with an emphasis on places recognisable to tourists and neglects the integral improvement of urban services and infrastructure that influence overall quality of life in the city. However, the relatively low numbers of members of the transnational elite in Belgrade⁴, as well as the small number of locals working at the top managerial positions in multinational companies, has yet to generate a profusion of large-scale gentrification projects; a pattern that is rather typical for the early phases of urban transformation in post-socialist cities (Kubes and Kovach, 2020). An influx of foreign direct investment and the opening of regional headquarters by foreign companies came only in the early 2000s – a result of Belgrade's delayed post-socialist transformation, which was itself caused by the city suffering international isolation and sanctions during the 1990s and the 1999 NATO air campaign. However, the global economic crisis of 2008 also slowed the city's development, which is also reflected in the modest number of transnational migrants.⁵ Moreover, as Belgrade was demolished and rebuilt many times throughout its long and turbulent history, the city lacks a significant monumental and architectural heritage. There are, in short, many reasons why Belgrade does not number among Europe's more attractive cities or important urban hubs.

Data Analysis

The following analysis aims to examine whether and how Belgrade could become an attractive and comfortable location for middle-class transnational migrants, and what possible inputs the research findings could provide to bolster strategic thinking about the city's urban policy. The analysis follows the thematic sections of the interviews as relevant for the focused subject: on Belgrade as desired (or undesired) migratory destination; on housing and working conditions in Belgrade in relation to the respondents' previous experiences; on the positive or negative sides of living in Belgrade, in accordance with the respondents' needs

4 Statistical data on the occupation or education of foreign immigrants in Belgrade are scarce, most of them have a high school or university degree, also most of them are employed in multinational companies, foreign banks, etc., while a number of them have also established small and medium-sized enterprises, or are employed by domestic enterprises. <https://moodiranje.rs/kako-zive-stranci-u-srbiji-oni-su-odabrali-nasu-zemlju-kao-svoj-dom-i-ima-ih-mnogo-vise-nego-sto-mislimo/>; visited on February 15th, 2020.

5 There is little reliable data on the number of foreigners living and working in Belgrade. According to the National Employment Service, around 5000–6000 annual work permits were issued to foreigners in the last couple of years. <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/410449/Drustvo/Stranac-svaki-250-gradanin-Srbije>; accessed on February 1st, 2020.

and habits; on how the respondents perceive the interplay between globally standardised places and locally specific content in Belgrade; and on respondents' reflections about leaving Belgrade. The results are illustrated with statements that best reflect the most common or diversified views of the respondents. The section begins by presenting relevant information about the method and socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Method and Sample

The semi-structured interviews with 21 transnational middle class-migrants – experts with university-level education, living and working in Belgrade at least for a year – were conducted from November 2018 to March 2019 by the Institute for Sociological Research, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. The interviewees were selected using the snowball method. The location of each interview, most often a coffee shop close to their place of work or residence, was selected by respondents themselves. The interviews were mostly conducted in English, however, a few respondents preferred to speak Serbian. Most respondents (nine) had lived in Belgrade for 1–2 years, three 3–5 years, and seven for more than five years. The majority of the interviewees worked for international companies or development agencies, while three respondents were directly employed by Serbian enterprises or institutions.

As pointed out above, these transnational actors reflexively judge the suitability of a particular city by positioning themselves at the intersections of social and geographical space, which includes experiences accumulated in previous localities where they have lived. For this reason, data were gathered on the respondents' place of birth and the places where they had worked before coming to Belgrade. Eleven interviewees were born in the so called 'old EU countries' (countries that were EU member states before the 2004/2007 enlargement), five in a 'new', post-socialist⁶ EU country, three in the USA and two in Turkey. All had, therefore, grown up in cities of developed countries or countries more developed than Serbia. The EU and US also prevail among the locations where the respondents had previously worked, as 16 respondents had worked only in these countries, eight had also worked in Asian, African and South American cities, two had worked only in other Western Balkan countries, while for three of the respondents Belgrade was their first destination outside of their country of origin.

Belgrade as Desired (or Undesired) Migratory Destination

In this segment, the perception of Belgrade as a desirable migratory destination is analysed on the basis of questions inquiring whether respondents wanted to move to Belgrade and what they knew about the city before they arrived.

Belgrade was not among the desired destinations for middle-class transnational migrants, even when they were not placed to work in Belgrade

6 None in former Yugoslav republics, as that was a precondition for selecting respondents.

by their employer. Although the majority had no particular influence on their migratory destination, some favoured Belgrade not for the city itself but because the Balkans had seemed to them interesting as a new experience, different from the West, as the usually preferred destination:

“During the year when I was on rotation, I knew the jobs that were available in different countries and different cities and, among what was available, Belgrade was the most interesting because it is part of [the] Balkans...” (R10).

“... I really like the Balkans ...I wanted to actually go to Sarajevo more than Belgrade... People usually go to France, England, [the] United States, and I thought why not try [a] totally different place, and, yeah, ok...” (R6).

Respondents mostly did not know much about Belgrade, if they knew anything, before coming to the city. Those who had some idea, based on previous, short tourist/working visits, superficially pointed to the city's interesting geographical position or specific food culture, but also noticed that Belgrade was rather unattractive to them during the 1990s or early 2000s:

“Nothing. It was the first time in my life that I came to Serbia. I didn't even have expectations” (R7).

“I had been to Belgrade several times before, as a tourist, as a visitor of course, and I liked the city. So what I knew the rivers were of interest to me, the culture was interesting as well, good food as well, maybe three highlights” (R10).

“But at that moment (early 2000), I didn't really like Belgrade, it was grey, pissed-off, sorry for that” (R14).

Residential and Working Conditions in Belgrade

This section opens the question of whether respondents had become more or less grounded through everyday practices and interactions in Belgrade's local contexts and potentially developed feeling of comfort in place. In order to check that assumption, respondents were first asked to assess the residential and working conditions they have experienced in Belgrade, in comparison to places where they had lived before.

The respondents did not show clear preference for certain residential districts in Belgrade, except the city centre in general, and were not concentrated geographically in gentrified neighbourhoods.⁷ All of them assessed the housing conditions in Belgrade as very favourable and comparable to EU standards. For almost all of them, their apartment in Belgrade offered them a feeling of

7 Most of the respondents (16) reside in central city municipalities Stari Grad and Vračar, especially in the most central city neighborhoods of Dorćol, areas around Knez Mihajlova Street, Cvetni trg, etc. Two respondents reside in Dedinje (exclusive pre-socialist, socialist and post-socialist elite residential area near the city centre), two in neighborhoods of Zvezdara, also very popular rather green residential area quite close to the city center, and one in New Belgrade, an ambitious socialist project experiencing a boom in the post-socialist period owing to its favourite position near the Belgrade central zone and available construction land.

home⁸, which they explained from a point of view typical of migrants. Thus, the majority of respondents felt at home simply because migrants have to be adaptable, which is all the easier if they live longer in a certain place or with a partner/children. Others pointed to another perspective typical of migrants, that of separating home as a place of origin from home as the sensory world of everyday experience (Collins, 2009):

“I don’t tend to be attached to space but, of course, I feel comfortable the longer I am somewhere...” (R10).

“Absolutely. Everywhere feels like home to me. I think because we [have] been here for a year and a half, my children grow here, so I feel like at home” (R9).

“Yes, absolutely, but it depends how you define home. I am thinking about going home for Christmas, so there is still another home. But definitely this feels like my home” (R19).

Working conditions were also assessed as very good, since most of the respondents worked in office space that was either newly built or refurbished in accordance with the latest world standards, which actually nullified the importance of the working place location:

“Our office is in the Airport city, it is actually quite nice, really well furnished, and [the] environment is cool, you don’t feel that you are actually in Belgrade. I can’t complain, it is quite awesome, even better than office in Boston” (R12).

Positive and Negative Sides to Live in Belgrade

The analysis now continues by turning to the question whether, in what way and to what extent Belgrade’s opportunity structure corresponds to the needs and way of life of transnational actors. This section is based on a set of questions through which the respondents assessed the positive and negative aspects of life in Belgrade. In trying to glean the respondents’ experience from the quotidian angle, the focus was on their local integration through different practices (shopping, going out, attending cultural events, etc.) and on their access to local information and service infrastructures (health, traffic, recycling, etc.), with special emphasis on the question of whether there were certain needs or habits they could not fulfil in Belgrade.

All of the respondents were rather satisfied with the way they spent their time in Belgrade, both on workdays and weekends. They found no fundamental differences in comparison to previous experiences, primarily because work-related activities dominated the organisation of their lives both in Belgrade and in other cities.

“... I am doing exactly the same. That means I am working too much all the time, ...exactly the same but in [another] country” (R6).

8 Only two respondents gave a negative answer. One with no explanation and the other referred to the problems of renting a furnished apartment: “When you don’t have your [own] stuff, it doesn’t really feel like mine” (R11).

For some, the walking distance from home to office was a kind of advantage to living in Belgrade:

“I think life is easier here because we can walk but otherwise [it] is pretty much the same. It is the same basic schedule” (R9).

The specific atmosphere of the city was almost universally singled out as the most positive side to living in Belgrade, described as a city that should be experienced. Most respondents associated it with the *bašta* concept of sitting outside and with the openness and kindness of local people, which helped them to feel more included and safer than elsewhere.

“Both me and my wife, we actually like the atmosphere in Belgrade, the way people are, we feel that we are welcomed” (R5).

“The fact that you have [the] concept *bašta*, it gives this message people are out, they are willing to interact... they are socializing. I like that about Belgrade” (R12).

“It’s very open, it’s [a] very safe city, when you compare [it] to other cities” (R13).

“Walking the streets... it’s more of an experience. And you don’t feel like in the Netherlands after a certain hour in the evening that you should not be on that street anymore” (R14).

The relatively *affordable cost of living, including an affordable and satisfactory cultural life*, were also among the most frequently highlighted positives of life in Belgrade, which helped respondents to feel more relaxed than in bigger, more developed, more famous and more expensive European or US cities:

“I enjoy it, that life is much cheaper here and we can afford more [for] our children. We can travel, we can live in [the] centre of the city, while in America it’s expensive” (R2).

“We can afford to live in a capital city of [a] European country, I couldn’t afford to live in London and go to really nice restaurants, bars, do stuff culturally all the time, but in Belgrade we can still afford to live a very nice life, like [a] cultural rich life. Compared to Western European cities I think it is more relaxed, there is more of a sense of freedom” (R19).

Although the majority of respondents thought that the range of cultural events on offer was good in Belgrade, they frequently pointed to the *language barrier to attending cultural events*, primarily theatre performances, museum exhibitions and the literary scene:

“I can’t go to theatre because I don’t understand the language, I would love [to] actually. What I usually do is either concerts or ballet” (R10).

“Museums could do a lot more to be aware that there are people who don’t speak Serbian. I mean the translations sometimes are horrible... There are a lot of interesting little museums, but they’re not really accessible to foreigners. I think my big frustration is that there are no good English

language bookshops. There are some but their selection is really poor, especially for children's books" (R13).

Language also appeared as barrier to accessing local information and services, particularly those related to kindergartens and healthcare in the public sector, as well as to information on public transport. For that reason, some respondents were rather frustrated and forced to postpone certain needs or felt lost in town:

"I had a really bad experience with the public nursery when my first son started to attend. He was a slow learner when it comes to languages and the teacher at the time did not have enough time or the energy or they are just not paid enough to handle [...] his speech impediment and so, we had to take him out of that public nursery. I would say that private nursery works better" (R2).

"I need medical services, but I am postponing it because of the language barrier, not anything else. My biggest worry would be like if there was an emergency whom would you call" (R20).⁹

"It happened to me that there was no tram, maybe they announced it, but I couldn't understand, because of the language, and I didn't know where to find that information" (R19).

Respondents had *additional critical remarks on public transport*, mostly pointing to non-compliance with the timetable or the poor condition of the vehicles:

"Because, you know, there is no timetable, when there is at the first station you can't orient yourself because it doesn't really apply... for example in the Czech Republic when the delay is 4 minutes the driver goes very fast to reduce these differences, and here I saw 57 minutes of delay and nothing, that's fine" (R8).

"When I take public transport, it's frequent, which is good. Just the quality of the buses is horrible. And the level of pollution that comes out of the buses is horrible" (R13).

The city's under-developed utility infrastructure and generally high level of pollution also were among the most frequently cited negative aspects of life in Belgrade, which affected the respondents' daily routines and the quality of life they have come to expect. They complained about the quality of the water and the air, as well as the lack of opportunities to recycle refuse. The introduction

9 Comparing the situation in Belgrade and the United States, however, one respondent highlighted the quality of health services in the private sector as the most positive side to living in Belgrade: "Actually, I like the medical service way better than in America. Technically, like I'm biased because I do the private health care and everyone tells me that public health care is much worse, but I have no idea. All I do is call the number and they make an appointment for me. It is so much harder in America, there is always long list of waiting and it is way more expensive, here is just perfect. So, I'm really going to miss Serbia for medical care" (R11).

of recycling containers was also assessed to be more of a marketing gimmick than a serious policy approach. Consequently, the respondents highlighted inadequate ecological awareness and behaviour of both the citizens and the city administration. Similarly, they criticised the difficulty of cycling in Belgrade, another practice that some of them had to give up:

“[The] quality of [the] water is low, I use filters, and water has a lot of things that you don’t want to drink” (R12).

“Air quality, 100% it is the worst thing” (R19).

“Yeah recycling is a bit poor isn’t it... you put everything in the same bin anyway, so I don’t think any of that is taken seriously... it’s a lot of marketing but without actually doing anything” (R18).

“Waste selection and recycling? Okay, I don’t think that’s something to talk about here” (R21).

“I used to bicycle to work. And then here... I should’ve said that the city is bike friendly, there is a bike path. But if you want to use the bike as a normal means of transport, of commuting, it’s not safe. So maybe it is something that I had to leave behind, and it’s a bit sad” (R17).

Despite the large number of newly opened restaurants that offer international cuisine, as well as a significant increase in the selection of various types of goods and brands on offer in Belgrade, the respondents had a lot of complains. Firstly, they assessed food *supply as limited*, particularly of *non-local or organic food*, both in shops and restaurants, which affected their diets. Additionally, most of the respondents found that the *choice of clothes, shoes, and electronics is rather narrow and that prices are too high* due to Belgrade’s peripheral position in the global market. Therefore, they preferred to buy these goods elsewhere, mostly in their home country/city, not primarily for economic reasons but in accordance with their transnational experience, knowledge and taste:

“I would say food, for instance Mexican food. I can find it, but it’s very limited. Yes, I guess I need [a] variety of food. I am missing eating African food, Peruvian, Lebanese, Thai, Japanese... they have restaurants here but they [are] missing those ingredients” (R2)

“There’s a limited selection of fresh – particularly fresh fruit and vegetables – especially in the winter. And that’s frustrating. When I think about all the things I could have in my diet, and you just can’t find anywhere. You can’t find good quality imports” (R13).

“It is difficult to find various products that are widely available in the Netherlands or in Western Europe. Clothes, well I try as hard as I can in the Netherlands. The prices are better, the quality, maybe... they produce for the A and B and C markets... which is complete absurd, since the standard is five times higher” (R14).

Thus, according to the fairly long list of negative aspects, the respondents’ daily routines were restricted to a certain extent by the available opportunity

structure. Moreover, it appeared that respondents were not quite willing to use globally standardized places (such as international cafes, restaurants, shopping malls) as an option to overcome local limits in their everyday behaviour. Indeed, the respondents admitted that they relied on these places more than they would have liked, mainly due to a lacking of available communication in English and especially due to widespread smoking in public places, which they considered extremely backward:

“I think that there is a big problem in Belgrade regarding global standards because everybody smokes everywhere... This is really going back in time” (R10).

“So, we enter as many shopping malls, because there [it] is forbidden to smoke. And that’s very sad, because I never used to spend time in shopping malls” (R17).

“If it is very urgent, I prefer malls, than I don’t need to speak much with people, I avoid the places where I need to go and talk, because usually they wouldn’t speak English well.” (R12).

Finally, *insufficient international travel connections* also emerged as a negative aspect of living in Belgrade that is particularly important for transnational actors, both in the sphere of work due to frequent travel and in the private sphere for the maintenance of family ties in the country of origin or leisure travel, such as popular weekend breaks, etc. According to the logic of global flows, smaller and geographically peripheral cities should increase their inclusion in international transport corridors and reduce the transport costs in order to become more important hubs (Hocevar, 2005). However, Belgrade’s international air travel options continue to rely on indirect connections through the biggest European or larger regional hubs, while the state protects the national airline, and in so doing prevents the emergence of a sufficient supply of low-cost flights. Furthermore, decades of under-investment in the railways further limits the available travel options and is reflected in the respondents’ perception of Belgrade as peripheral European city, mostly unsuitable for fast and easy connections:

“I would like to have a flight to all the hubs every hour, but that is wishful thinking. Probably compared to the demands that are available it is already reasonably well connected” (R10).

“I mean, you can fly to Rome or Paris or London, from there you can go anywhere” (R17).

“No! Because most of the times I have to go to Budapest, and from Budapest I have flights for other places. And even going to Budapest is problematic, bad trains, very slow...” (R20).

“It is not easy to get from here to many destinations. It may simply be easy, but the cost, the price, is incredibly high. So, the absence of low-cost companies here is really, I think, bad and harmful...” (R14).

*The Interplay of the Global and the Local
in Belgrade's Urban Development*

Due to the locations where the respondents lived and worked, transurbanism refers primarily to Belgrade's central urban area. In recent years, this exact area has been a special focus of the city's development policy, primarily through the restoration of facades, rejuvenation of city squares, car-free zones or parks, the expansion of modern shopping chains, cafes and restaurants with a significant representation of global brands, thus aiming to create an image of a modern Belgrade keeping pace with European capitals or world cities. Previous findings indicated that respondents gave preference to local content over the globally standardized. Starting from the assumption that transnational middle-class migrants support the glocalization process, this section analyses their views about the global-local interplay in refashioning contemporary Belgrade.

An approximately equal number of respondents thought that Belgrade has too many globally standardized places as thought that it has exactly as many as it should have. Only a few thought that Belgrade lacks such places.¹⁰ Therefore, most respondents either had a critical view of the global standardisation of Belgrade or were satisfied that standardisation has not yet become so widespread as to jeopardize the local character of the city, which was perceived as not utterly absorbed by corporate capitalism:

“Global standardisation is too much for me. I'm happy with Belgrade the way it is... it's not corporatized in the way that many other cities are... where you get just the same experience, from one city to the next...” (R13).

“Belgrade has one face when it comes to having fun, going out, places where different types of people come out, places that are very specific and very individual, and I think it's a special face of Belgrade and it would be a shame to enforce that global standardization, like as a hipster lifestyle or like Starbucks or something. It is better for Belgrade to remain so with the local face” (R16).

When asked to name the places they consider to be specifically local, respondents most often mentioned open-air markets (*pijaca*) and traditional *kafanas*. They predominantly perceived Skadarlija to be commercialised attraction for tourists but also pointed to newly opened restaurants in accordance with the kafana model as a good mix of local ideas with global standards. However, they noticed that similar examples of local design shops (footwear, clothing, furniture, etc.) are much rarer:

“Skadarlija, Skadarska... I am not big fan of tourist traps. Because you can feel that is set up for tourists” (R15).

“There are still some good kafanas around. There could be more... but no, there are lots of good ones. Not necessarily really traditional kafana

10 “The city is not sufficiently developed in this respect. A lot is missing, yes. Well, brands... global chains of anything, shops, hotels...” (R7).

types, but things that are new and interesting, you know, have a real Belgrade flavour” (R13).

“Honestly, I don’t know about (local) clothes and designers, I haven’t seen very many” (R11).

“And there are a few nice designer shops, even if they are not particularly... Serbian, in that sense. They are recycling a Serbian product into something fashionable. But they are [a] very nice brand” (R17).

The respondents’ general inclination toward the local context also prevailed when answering the question of whether Belgrade should, in strategic terms, follow the development model of some other cities. To the extent that such an approach would imply projects that might threaten Belgrade’s local specificities, the respondents were against it. In fact, they were very critical of large and expensive projects that simulate global architectural forms/designs and stated that, instead, investment priorities should focus on communal infrastructure and urban services, so as to increase the general quality of life in Belgrade:

“Why should you? You are Belgrade. I don’t see a reason for that” (R5)

“No, other cities are also going in [the] wrong direction with profit-oriented urban planning strategies. Big multi corporations being visible in the city landscape, not visible just in terms of architecture, but also symbolically dominating the spaces... killing unique culture” (R20).

“Well, I think that Belgrade should remain its own... But in those aspects that are, I don’t know, public transport, bicycle infrastructure, recycling... In that sense, yes, yes. I should really look up to it” (R14).

In this respect, only a few respondents felt that the Belgrade Waterfront project brings about positive changes. Most respondents expressed criticism that the project would deny the city’s unique character, thus depriving Belgrade of its attractiveness and charm:

“I think they’ve been trying to create a fake, posh neighbourhood. So that’s maybe global standard, but I think it’s a bit out of place in Belgrade” (R17).

“I mean, they try to present all those Waterfront area as a brand, but it is so problematic. Rivers are [a] brand but they take it in the wrong way. It makes me feel like, that the city is kind of less inclusive, that developers don’t think about people’s needs and that this creates pressure and [a] negative atmosphere.” (R20).

“I used to enjoy very much Savamala¹¹ before it was all drowned... I quite like this kind of stuff, and I always enjoy that about Belgrade, and the more it gets regulated the more boring it becomes...” (R18).

11 Savamala is a central area of the city, close to the site where the Belgrade Waterfront project is under construction. During the 2000s, Savamala became an authentic centre of urban culture, full of creative workshops, art galleries, nightlife, like cafes and restaurants, all housed in previously abandoned buildings and warehouses in an otherwise inconspicuous part of the city. Once the BW project began, some of the creative content was relocated and

Leaving Belgrade

For most of the respondents, Belgrade was initially not a well-known or particularly desirable destination. However, their positive assessment of housing and working conditions, of low living costs that had allowed them to attain a satisfactory way of life, of a specific atmosphere in the city, both exciting and relaxed at the same time, of a Belgrade not yet too globally standardized, indicated that transnational middle-class migrants did feel quite comfortable in Belgrade. Yet, the fact that they faced limits to satisfying some needs and daily habits pointed to inadequacy in intersections of their habitus and the available opportunity structure, which resulted in a kind of contradictory experience of Belgrade:

“Belgrade is just so hard to describe, is not like any other city I’ve ever been to, I don’t know, just like a lot of contradictions” (R11).

In line with that, the respondents’ plans for leaving Belgrade revealed that they perceived the city as an appropriate place to live during the rather short period of their employment contracts. Most respondents expected to leave Belgrade in a couple of years, emphasising that they had had a nice time but were also looking forward to a change. Some respondents planned to leave soon for the purpose of their children’s education¹² or other reasons confirming that the city did not suit them any longer. Just five respondents did not have concrete plans to leave Belgrade because the city well-matched their needs, at least in the current period of their life:

“It suits me right now to be here. Even if I lose my job, I would try to find a new job in Belgrade, and only if there is a problem I would think about leaving” (R1).

“We are moving for [a] variety of reasons but the main reason is that I want my youngest son to start school in America” (R2).

“Ah, it depends on the contract, because it’s a competition, every project, so I do projects.... I’m quite happy here... but not much longer” (R18).

Concluding Remarks

Having started from complete ignorance or with little more than superficial impressions about Belgrade, some of which were very negative, the respondents developed a rather positive attitude towards the city. Both their affinity for local content and the importance of affordable living costs reflected the specific ratio of cultural to economic capital in transnational middle-class migrants’ social position/habitus, and had the most significant impact on their experience of Belgrade as sufficiently attractive and comfortable city. However, their embodied

there is a growing sense that the whole area will lose the features of the alternative cultural scene, to be replaced by an imported cultural globalism.

12 Seven of the respondents had children, but only four lived with them (all pre-school children) in Belgrade. All of them plan to educate their children elsewhere, not in Belgrade.

understandings of how to live in Belgrade, as an emerging logic of practice at the intersection of their habitus and Belgrade's opportunity structure, at the same time jeopardized these feelings. In this respect, utility infrastructure and public services (healthcare and childcare), waste recycling, water and air quality, alternative travel options, supply of diversified goods, etc., were perceived as insufficiently developed according to contemporary global standards. Limited access to local information, services, cultural events and authentic local places (like museums) due to language barriers were particularly emphasised. All this distanced the respondents from the possibility of fully satisfying their needs and practice a way of life that is in accordance with their habits and cultural capital accumulated through transnational experience. Therefore, the respondents predominantly experienced Belgrade as an acceptable place to live in for only a limited period of time.

The transnational middle-class migrants in Belgrade confirmed that these expatriates look for cultural heterogeneity, settle in a dispersed way and mingle with the local population. Besides, the respondents favoured the places that reflect locally specific contexts over their globally standardised equivalents, which they used mainly to overcome situations when the local context remained inaccessible to them due to inadequate standards of urban services and infrastructure. In addition, respondents noticed that diverse local content (such as designer shops) that promote local authenticity in a new and fashionable way should be encouraged. Thus, the study confirmed that middle-class transnational actors support glocalization processes and disapprove the over-standardization of urban space. Finally, speaking of the attractiveness of a relaxed urban atmosphere, respondents often pointed out that Belgrade has not yet been deeply absorbed by global capitalism like most European cities. That, unfortunately, is more a result of the city's delayed post-socialist urban transformation than of a comprehensive strategic approach to urban development.

To conclude, what do these key research findings suggest that is relevant to Belgrade's urban policy development? From the respondents' point of view, rather than reproducing globally standardized flagship projects, increasing the number of shopping malls and similar uniformed spaces, policy should concentrate primarily on preserving the city's specific atmosphere by balancing local and global content, as well as by making authentic local values more accessible to transnational actors by overcoming existing limitations in urban services and infrastructure. In other words, Belgrade's urban policy should take the local and the global as mutually constitutive (Massey 2004) and enhance the overall quality of life as a key precondition for sustainably improving the city's image (Anholt, 2010). Therefore, the creators of Belgrade's urban policy should constantly bear in mind that although all cities are touched by the process of globalization, they do not (and should not) converge to a single model of globalized city (Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000:263). Finding an original local-global interplay is a complex task that requires a cooperative and inclusive approach to urban planning, especially considering that it is the local people who create the city's specific atmosphere. This, however, is in stark contrast to the dominant practice of investor-led urbanism in Belgrade today.

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