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## GLOBAL-LOCAL KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSLOCAL SPACES IN THE CITY: THE CASE OF BELGRADE<sup>3</sup>

### Globalno – lokalna razmena znanja i stvaranje translokalnih prostora u gradu: studija slučaja Beograda

**ABSTRACT:** *The focus of this paper is exploration of translocal spaces through examination of global-local knowledge exchange between middling migrants and ‘cosmopolitan’ locals in semi-peripheral urban contexts. Translocal spaces are taken as concrete places (workplace, venue of business meeting, places for entertainment and recreation, public spaces, etc.) where interactions between middling migrants and the local population occur and where global and local knowledge, experience and practice are exchanged.*

*The analysis is based on the results of qualitative research conducted in Belgrade (from November 2018 to March 2019). The sample is composed of 42 respondents: 21 middling migrants (well-educated transmigrants employed in international companies, developmental agencies, embassies and universities) and 21 ‘cosmopolitan’ locals (Serbian employees in international companies and agencies who have been educated abroad and/or have a rich experience of working in a multinational environment).*

*The paper focuses on two aspects: (1) opportunities and obstacles for global-local knowledge exchange; and (2) spaces in Belgrade where this exchange most frequently occurs and that, as a consequence, become translocal.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Middling migration, translocal spaces, global-local knowledge exchange, Belgrade*

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**APSTRAKT:** *U fokusu ovog rada se nalazi istraživanje translokalnih prostora kroz analizu globalno-lokalne razmene znanja između trans-migranata i „kosmopolitskog“ lokalnog stanovništva u poluperifernom urbanom kontekstu. Translokalni prostori se uzimaju kao konkretna mesta (radno mesto, mesto održavanja poslovnih sastanaka, mesta za zabavu i rekreaciju, javni prostori itd.) na kojima se ostvaruju interakcije između trans-migranata i lokalnog stanovništva i razmenjuju globalna i lokalna znanja, iskustva i prakse.*

*Analiza se zasniva na rezultatima kvalitativnog istraživanja sprovedenog u Beogradu (novembar 2018 – mart 2019). Uzorak čine 42 ispitanika: 21 trans-migrant (visoko obrazovani migranti koji su zaposleni u međunarodnim kompanijama, razvojnim agencijama, ambasadama i univerzitetima) i 21 „kosmopolitski lokalac“ (državljeni Srbije zaposleni u međunarodnim kompanijama i agencijama, koji su obrazovani u inostranstvu i / ili imaju bogato iskustvo rada u multinacionalnom okruženju).*

*Rad se fokusira na dva aspekta: (1) mogućnosti i prepreke za globalno-lokalnu razmenu znanja; i (2) prostori u Beogradu u kojima se ova razmena najčešće ostvaruje i koji na taj način postaju trans-lokalni.*

**KLJUČNE REČI:** *Migracije pripadnika srednje klase, translokalni prostori, globalno-lokalna razmena znanja, Beograd*

## Introduction

International migrations represent a salient component of the contemporary globalized world (Iredale, 2001) and are one of the fundamental aspects of the “space of flows” in networked society (Castells, 2000). Transnational migrations, especially of highly skilled labour, are regarded as a constitutive factor of city growth and global competitiveness (Beaverstock, 2002; Beaverstock, 2005; Castells, 2000; Sassen, 2001; Ploger & Becker, 2015; Dubucs et al., 2017). Skilled migrants are one of the channels through which transnational human, cultural and economic capital is accumulated, networks are built, cosmopolitanism is spread and urban spaces transformed (Castells, 2000; Hannerz, 1996; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2001). The socio-spatial action of transnational migrants is one of the important features of the development of transnationality in the city (Smith, 1999; Smith, 2001). Their action takes place in certain urban spaces which, due to the nature of the interactions (global-local exchange) become translocal (Hannerz, 1996; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2001; Glick-Schiller & Çağlar, 2011).

Research on the migration-urbanism nexus has a long history. Until recently, however, urban migration studies have been polarised as a bulk of the work has either concentrated on the marginalized migrants and the urban problems their arrival creates, or on a privileged migratory elite and the benefits they bring to global cities (Beaverstock, 2005; Beaverstock, 2012; Sklair, 2001; Brown, 2014; Croucher, 2012; Hayes, 2015). However, middle-class migrations have been understudied (van Riemsdijk & Wang, 2017), and only recently has the phenomenon of the “middling of migration” been recognized in the literature (Conradson & Latham, 2005; Kunz, 2016; Plöger & Becker, 2015). It is important

to note that the career paths and related mobility, as well as the urban practices and lifestyles of middling migrants significantly differ from those of elite and low-skilled migrants, and they therefore deserve greater attention (Dubucs et al., 2017). Moreover, the focus of urban migration scholarship has primarily been on global cities, while ordinary (Amin & Graham, 1997), or (semi-)peripheral cities remain underexplored (Dubucs et al., 2017; Jaskulowski, 2020). This paper aims to fill a gap in the extant literature by focusing on middle-class transmigrants in a semi-peripheral city. More precisely, the aim of this paper is to explore the exchange of knowledge between middling migrants and the local population and the creation of translocal spaces in Belgrade. The focus on translocal spaces stems from an interest in the two main roles they play: first, as a place of global-local knowledge exchange, and second, their role in transforming the city. These spaces, whose meaning is co-created by middling migrants and cosmopolitan locals can play the roles both of stimulating knowledge exchange and also hindering it, depending on whether they offer the actors involved a sense of safety or unexpected (potentially unpleasant) experiences. On the other hand, these spaces can either contribute to the development of the urban periphery or they can remain isolated islands of transnationality, without significantly impacting peripheral cities, regions or the wider urban population. The analysis herein is based on the results of qualitative research conducted in Belgrade from November 2018 to March 2019.

## Theoretical Framework

In the first two decades of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the migration of highly-skilled labour has grown in size and has diversified (Maslova & Chiodelli, 2018) from primarily consisting of top-level employees of multinational corporations (Beaverstock, 2002) to including more middle-class professionals (Conradson & Latham, 2005; Scott, 2006). Today, highly-skilled migrations are heterogeneous and occur in a variety of forms: permanent or temporary; both within and outside the structures of multinational corporations; due to economic reasons but also for the purposes of family reunion or as a result of displacement due to conflict or political instability (Ploger & Becker, 2015:1519; Conradson & Latham, 2005; Scott, 2004).

Middling migrants usually occupy middle management positions or positions that require higher education and specialised knowledge, such as IT specialists, academics, managers, etc. (Jaskulowski, 2020). In comparison to members of the hyper mobile global elite, middle-class migrants are less 'de-territorialised' – meaning that they build stronger ties with host societies while, at the same time, maintaining closer links with their home country (Jaskulowski, 2018; Jaskulowski, 2020; Meier, 2015; Hannerz, 1996). In other words, middle-class migrants tend to negotiate between mobility and settlement, with varying levels of local integration and engagement with the local population. As noted by Glick Schiller et al.: "... a new kind of migrating population is emerging, composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries

and bring two societies into a single social field ... a new conceptualisation is needed in order to come to terms with the experience and consciousness of this new migrant population. We call this new conceptualisation “transnationalism”, and describe the new type of migrants as transmigrants” (Glick Schiller et al., 1992:1). How middling migrants affect urban environments is specific and differs from the impact of the hyper mobile elite. However, this phenomenon remains understudied as it has only recently become a topic of research interest (Jaskulowski, 2020).

The temporary or more permanent settlement of transnational migrants in peripheral urban spaces and the related question of their impact on local environments, brings us to the concept of *transnational urbanism* introduced by Smith (2001). Smith uses this concept to describe a multifaceted process of intertwining global and local dynamics, emphasising that urban space is constantly produced (or reproduced) through the interaction of external (global) forces and internal (local) socio-spatial structures and practices (Smith, 2001:183). Of course, one should bear in mind the limitations of the binarity of the local-global distinction, especially taking into consideration both structural and actors’ dimension of globalization. Globalization implies that the spatial scale, where social life is located, is becoming more complex, and in fact leads to increasing local, regional, national and global disparities, as well as to a new logic of their interconnection (Pajvančić-Cizelj, 2017). To a certain extent, Smith (2001) overcomes this binarity by introducing the concept of *transnationalism*. This concept recognises the importance and scope of contemporary global mobility, while insisting on continuing significance of place and locality (Smith, 2001; Conradson & Latham, 2005: 228–9). Smith conceptualized transnationalism in terms of the agency of transnational migrants, manifested through their practices, social relations and networks, grounded in certain social spaces (i.e. the household, the firm, the financial district, the community centre) that, as a consequence, become translocal (Beaverstock, 2005:249). Therefore, for analysis of transnational urbanism, Smith suggests using an approach oriented towards the quotidian practices and everyday lives of transnational actors and their role in the creation of translocal spaces (Smith 2005a: 236 cf. Petrović, 2020:10). This approach seems useful since even hyper-mobile individuals are grounded in their physical presence at certain places and in their territorially situated everyday activities, such as working, sleeping, eating, exercising, etc. (Conradson & Latham, 2005: 686). Therefore, knowledge exchange with the local population, as well as the level of local integration of middling migrants, can be observed through their everyday practices in different arenas: work, leisure, family life, use of local institutions and infrastructure, etc.<sup>4</sup>

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4 It should be noted, however, that while translocal connections are supported and maintained by modern means of communication and transportation (Smith, 1999), the level of local integration of transmigrants and the intensity of their communication and exchange with the local population depends on a number of factors such as: career and family status, reasons for migration, conditions of employment, duration of stay, career aspirations and mobility plans (relocation, return to country of origin, permanent stay, etc.) (Beaverstock 2002; Beaverstock, 2005; Walsh, 2014).

In this paper, we focus in particular on *knowledge exchange* between middling migrants and the domiciled population. In migration studies, knowledge exchange and transfer are recognized as a key dimension of the globalization process, however, research on how international labour migration contributes to knowledge exchange has been limited in scope and mostly fragmented (Williams, 2006; Williams, 2007). Extant literature shows that transmigrants are important agents in the process of knowledge transfer and can play a significant role as knowledge brokers in host societies (Wenger, 2000; Williams, 2006; Williams, 2007). However, studies also demonstrate that knowledge transfer is necessarily selective and context dependent, since some types of knowledge and certain skills cannot be transferred easily – for example, language specific knowledge (Dustmann et al., 2003). On the other hand, some types of knowledge, for instance mathematics, programming, or sporting expertise are easily transferable, as they are much less contextually specific (Williams, 2007). Of course, the receptiveness of the host society to knowledge transfer largely depends on wider socio-political and cultural conditions (i.e. openness for intercultural exchange, attitudes towards foreigners, etc.).

In this paper, we chiefly focus on the working environment, since both transnational corporations (TNC) and smaller firms have demonstrated a significant role in facilitating the movement of labour and the transfer of knowledge (Beaverstock, 2005; Beaverstock, 2012). One of the important roles of migrants, in terms of knowledge transfer, is their ability to be reflexive about the culture of the society in which they are settling. Transnational migrants embody the cross-border circulation of knowledge and skills (Hannerz, 1996; Smith, 2001) and constitute “epistemic communities” that have significant impact on knowledge transfer (Beaverstock, 2005). In organisational settings, they can be valuable employees as they are able to reflect upon the effects of organizational culture on productivity, comparing it to their previous job or other cultures they have experienced. The potential for critical reflexivity over taken-for-granted cultural practices, can make transmigrants successful in their role of intercultural brokers (especially in cases where international borders constitute barriers for knowledge exchange). In their role of knowledge brokers, transnational migrants are valuable for their potential to transfer uncommon and distinctive knowledge. However, it should be noted that knowledge brokerage requires an individual to earn legitimacy and respect from the local population, as well as to bring something really new to an organization and/or local community (Wenger, 2000; Williams, 2007).

In multinational companies and international organisations, employees can be parent-country nationals (coming from the country where the company headquarters are located), home-country nationals or third-country nationals (Ibraiz et al., 2006:22). In the literature, the first and third categories are also recognised as “expatriates” (Beaverstock, 2002; Ratković, 2014). International engagement of expats is usually initiated by multinational companies or international organisations that offer an existing employee a transfer to a local branch where there is a vacancy. In addition to filling positions that cannot be

filled by local staff, expats are expected to transfer competencies and expertise from the company's headquarters, to train local employees and encourage them to develop an international perspective. Expatriates are expected to transfer the organisational culture of the parent company to foreign branches, thus contributing to the creation of an international corporate culture. This is especially important when there are large cultural differences between the company's country of origin and the host country (Ratković, 2014:228–9).

Earlier research has demonstrated that global-local knowledge exchange depends on relations between middling migrants and 'Western educated/experienced' (cosmopolitan) locals (Beaverstock, 2002; Jaskulowski, 2020). Research on global-local knowledge exchange in a global city (Singapore) conducted by Beaverstock, revealed that Western expats tend to develop networks of knowledge exchange either with other Westerners or with Western-socialised Singaporean colleagues, but generally avoid local population (Beaverstock, 2002: 531–2). Therefore, expatriates' knowledge accumulation and dissemination tend to be embedded within their global-local corporate networks, while, at the same time, disembedded from the local settings because of a conscious decision to limit interactions with the local population (Ibid., 536). Likewise, research conducted in the context of peripherality (the Polish cities of Strzelin and Jelcz-Laskowice) showed an almost complete lack of sociability between middling migrants and the local population (Jaskulowski, 2020). Therefore, in our research on knowledge exchange, we took into consideration the specific intermediary role of Western-educated/experienced (cosmopolitan) locals in the co-creation of translocal spaces in Belgrade.

## Contextual Background

In the literature on migration, transnational elites have generally been associated with global cities (Hannerz, 1996; Smith, 1999, 2001; Beaverstock, 2002) and only recently has the migration of highly-skilled professionals to peripheral cities become a topic of research interest (Jaskulowski, 2017; Jaskulowski, 2020). In this paper, we focus on the case of Belgrade, which belongs to the category of semi-peripheral, postsocialist cities (Vujović & Petrović, 2007; Petrović & Backović, 2019).

Belgrade is the capital of Serbia and a regional metropolis, with a population of 1.7 million people. It was the political capital of socialist Yugoslavia, and an important economic and cultural centre in the region. Although it shares many characteristics of post-socialist cities, it should be noted that Belgrade experienced considerable decline during the 1990s with the demise of the Yugoslav federation and ethnic conflict (Vujović & Petrović, 2007: 362). Due to the slow pace of post-socialist transformation, it was only after 2000 that Belgrade started to align with a wider global trend of "city entrepreneurialism" (Petrović, 2020: 12). Although it is a regional metropolis and although it is globalising (Petrović, 2020), Belgrade cannot be regarded as a "global city" (Goler & Lehmeier, 2012). Being situated at the European periphery, it is currently of no greater



continental or global importance (Goler & Lehmeier, 2012: 41). In comparison with EU metropolises, Belgrade has a severely underdeveloped transport system (thus, low levels of connectivity) and, although it contains seats of political institutions and larger companies, their significance is mostly national (rarely regional). Still, it is important, as it generates almost 40% of Serbia's GDP and is home to approximately one quarter of the country's population. The majority of the investment, as well as important strategic information and technological innovation goes to Belgrade first, which underlines its primacy in relation to the rest of Serbia (Goler & Lehmeier, 2012: 41– 43).

Belonging to the semi-periphery, Serbia is traditionally a country of emigration<sup>5</sup> (Bobić, 2013). Due to the low levels of immigration<sup>6</sup>, the 1990s wars in former Yugoslav republics, economic sanctions and the NATO air campaign, reticence, distrust and even hostility towards foreigners are widespread, manifesting in high levels of ethnic distance and xenophobia among the Serbian population (Sekelj, 2000; Radoman, 2012; Bobić, 2013; Mladenov-Jovanović, 2019).

From 2000, with the change of regime and the commencement of EU integration processes, Serbia slowly started to open up towards the West in socio-political, cultural and economic terms. In the last two decades a significant number of international and multinational companies, development agencies and foreign embassies began operating or returned to Serbia, with most basing their operations in Belgrade. These companies and organisations can be regarded as places where interactions between Serbian nationals and people coming from all over the world are most intensive, and thus these spaces have the potential to become translocal (Beaverstock, 2005; 2012). Recent research has shown that around one half of the international companies working in Serbia employ expats, usually in top-management positions (Ratković, 2014:231–2).

Although not great in number, some of the immigrants in Serbia are middling migrants who work in international companies. Statistical data on this type of immigration are not available, but we can get a general idea about the volume of this type of migration from the annual publication *Migration Profile of Serbia*<sup>7</sup>. In 2019, 5,892 foreigners were granted temporary residence on the basis of work<sup>8</sup>. According to another data source (the National Employment Service), somewhere around 5,000 annual work permits are issued to foreigners in Belgrade, most of them belonging to the category of middling migrants (higher education, employees of international organisations, etc.) (Petrović, 2020:12).

5 In recent years, however, there is a notable increase in immigration from two main sources: readmission of Serbian citizens from the EU, on the one hand, and asylum seekers striving to reach Western Europe, on the other (Bobić, 2013).

6 With the exception of the 1990s when large numbers of Serbian refugees came from war-affected former Yugoslav countries and the recent large migratory wave of Middle-Eastern refugees passing through Serbia on their way to Western Europe (Petrović & Pešić, 2017).

7 Available at: [http://www.kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracije/Publikacije/Migracioni\\_profil\\_Republike\\_Srbi.%20godinu.pdf](http://www.kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracije/Publikacije/Migracioni_profil_Republike_Srbi.%20godinu.pdf) (Accessed 10/10/2020.)

8 Migracioni profil Republike Srbije za 2019. godinu, p. 12. Available at: [http://www.kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracije/Publikacije/Migracioni\\_profil\\_Republike\\_Srbi.%20godinu.pdf](http://www.kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracije/Publikacije/Migracioni_profil_Republike_Srbi.%20godinu.pdf) (Accessed 10/10/2020.)

Expats working for international companies in Serbia have frequent encounters with local organisational culture, which is characterised by a high distance of power, high avoidance of uncertainty and pronounced collectivism (Hofstede 2001, see more in: Mojić, 2003). Local business culture is still characterised by certain features inherited from the socialist past, such as anti-professionalism and values of self-governing and egalitarian distribution (Županov, 1987), which are not compatible with the logic of neoliberal capitalism. On the other hand, the primary role of expats is to manage the performance of the local branch in accordance with general company policy and to transfer relevant knowledge, knowhow and practices (Ratković, 2014). International companies and organisations in Serbia are, therefore, the places where conflicting business cultures most frequently encounter one another and where the most intensive global-local knowledge exchanges occur. However, this paper will not look only at companies as spaces of local-global knowledge exchange but will also take into account spaces beyond the professional sphere. Places beyond the professional sphere are significant to the analysis because they are where a shift in roles occurs (from the professional to the private) and where less formal relationships are established. Moreover, these places encourage the activation of untapped resources in the exchange of global-local knowledge, particularly when it comes to cosmopolitan locals who are able to provide rich 'local' knowledge that is of particular significance in non-professional settings.

## Methods

The analysis in this paper is based on the results of qualitative research carried out in Belgrade from November 2018 to March 2019. Semi-structured interviews<sup>9</sup> were conducted with a total of 42 respondents: 21 transnational middle-class migrants who are employees of development agencies, financial institutions, international corporations, and universities, and who have lived in Belgrade for at least one year; and 21 cosmopolitan locals (Serbian employees in international companies and agencies who have been educated abroad and/or have a rich experience of working in multinational environments). The interviewees were recruited using the snowball sampling technique.

Following Conradson and Latham (2005), in this paper we use the term 'middling' migrants to signify professionals with middle-class background who generally occupy a mid-level position in a company or have a mid-level career. Most of the respondents frequently change their place of work and move from one country to another and therefore belong to the group of "permanent migrants/expats" (Beaverstock, 2005). The transnational migrants under study are characterised by their education and expertise, high-mobility, transnational careers and cosmopolitan culture (Beaverstock, 2002; Beaverstock, 2005). Given that previous research (Beaverstock, 2002; Jaskulowski, 2020) showed that expats tend not to develop direct relations with the local population but only with a

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9 The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and these transcripts comprise the analytical corpus.



special segment of it – i.e. cosmopolitan locals – respondents belonging to this category are regarded as a bridge between the local population and transnational migrants, and were studied as such. Middling migrants are explored in their role of intercultural brokers and transmitters of international discourses in the city mainly through their interaction with the cosmopolitan locals. Particular focus was placed on the values, habits and practices that are spread by transnational migrants in the spaces that become translocal and on local knowledge, practices and values that they acquired during their stay in Belgrade. Finally, translocal spaces are observed as concrete places (workplace, places of residence, entertainment and recreation, and public spaces) where contacts are being made between transnationals and cosmopolitan locals, and where global and local knowledge, experience and practice are being exchanged.

Analysis of the interviews is based on a combination of deductive and inductive approaches to qualitative content analysis. The deductive approach implies the use of predefined categories of analysis, which are determined before data analysis (Fajgelj, 2012: 424–425, Manić, 2017: 54–55). The unit of analysis is the interview as a whole (Elo & Kyngas, 2007; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The predefined categories that we have determined in accordance with the research goal are: (1) knowledge exchange opportunities; (2) knowledge exchange obstacles; (3) places where translocal exchange most frequently occur. An inductive approach was applied within each predefined category. Empirical material was read on the basis of predefined criteria, but additional categories were built into the process of data analysis and coding (Fajgelj, 2012: 424–425; Manić, 2017: 54–55).

## Findings

### *Global-Local Knowledge Exchange*

Previous research has demonstrated that middling migrants bring with them transnational cultural, social, economic, and human capital (Hannerz, 1996; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2001). We were, therefore, interested in the kind of knowledge the cosmopolitan locals in Belgrade acquire in their interactions with middling migrants. Analysis of the interviews discerned two dominant perspectives: a critical review of the socio-cultural obstacles for global-local knowledge exchange, and a perception of knowledge exchange as an incentive for personal growth and development of local business culture. In this section we will focus on the knowledge exchange opportunities, while the next two sections will be devoted to the examination of the two major obstacles for meaningful knowledge exchange: language and unequal power relations.

Earlier research has shown that knowledge exchange between cosmopolitan locals and middling migrants most often takes place in international companies, which consequently become translocal spaces (Beaverstock, 2005; Beaverstock, 2012). Although work-related knowledge exchange between cosmopolitan locals and middling migrants dominates in their responses, the exchange of knowledge is by no means restricted to the business realm. Valuable exchange also takes

place in the sphere of culture (i.e. music, film, art, etc.) and everyday life (e.g. the adoption of the habits of drinking coffee, consuming certain foods or frequenting cafes, taverns and night clubs). Outside of the business environment, where the primary role of foreign employees is to transfer relevant knowledge and corporate culture to local employees, the exchange that occurs is more visibly a two-way process where both the cosmopolitan locals and the middling migrants play the role of representatives of their cultures and their cultural repertoires.

Focusing now on the business sphere as a space of global-local knowledge exchange, it should be noted that even in transnational corporations operating in Serbia, local organisational culture plays a significant role (as the majority of employees are Serbian citizens (Ratković, 2014)). Since anti-professionalism is one of the important legacies of organisational culture carried over from Serbia's recent past (Županov, 1987; Mojić, 2014), it is not surprising that professionalism (work discipline, dedication, productivity, transparency, good communication) is mentioned by local respondents as the most important benefit of working with expats in a multinational environment.

*“I learned a lot from the Germans about professionalism, they do everything as professionally as possible... I think it's the best approach to work” (RD1)<sup>10</sup>*

Professionalism is also manifested in the relationships between employees. The model that middling migrants tend to establish and disseminate in Serbian companies, and that the cosmopolitan locals consider as an advantage in comparison to domestic business culture, is decent communication, the absence of intimacy at work, and setting clear boundaries between the professional and private spheres.

*“I have learned decent behaviour, absolute moderation in communication and a restraint in making comments” (RD14)*

Serbian society is still characterised by traditional-patriarchal values. This contributes to the creation and maintenance of gender inequality at work (Mojić, 2014: 162). Middling migrants are perceived by local respondents as important mediators in the modernisation process, especially in the sphere of gender equality.

*“Foreigners provide women much more space to work, to develop...” (RD17)*

While there was more variety in the answers related to knowledge that cosmopolitan locals have adopted from middling migrants, when it comes to knowledge that cosmopolitan locals have passed on to their foreign colleagues, one answer dominates: local expertise, i.e. deep understanding of local circumstances.

*“Probably that's why they employ us locals, because we have local expertise, we're not just administrators... Most foreigners don't know anything when they come here, they need support...” (RD13)*

10 Excerpts from interviews are marked with the following codes: RF for respondent foreigner and RD for respondent local; and with the serial number of the interviewee.

However, local respondents are not satisfied with the company's system of rewards since their knowledge is not sufficiently appreciated, which is manifested in the fact that they are *"doing significant job which is three times less paid than theirs [that of foreign employees]."* (RD2)

On the other hand, from the accounts of several foreign respondents it can be discerned that they have adopted certain approaches to work originating from the local culture, which deviate from the professional model they brought with them: a relaxed attitude towards and acceptance of inability to make long-term plans in the context of relatively high uncertainties.

*"No stress, just relax and go with the flow, sometimes you can't interfere with your life, just take it easy ("polako"), and it will solve itself."* (RF6)

*"I've learned that it's hard to plan too much in advance because things change, and that I shouldn't burden myself too much when things don't go the way I planned. I have learned to be prepared for things that are uncertain."* (RF1)

Anti-professionalism as a feature of the local business culture is observed by expat interviewees in terms of: 1) delay and fluidity; 2) lack of control; 3) informal communication, 4) inability to separate work performance from personal lives. However, some aspects of anti-professionalism, e.g. the lack of strict order and control at work, are not perceived by middling migrants exclusively from a critical perspective. They see certain advantages in terms of greater opportunities for the self-actualisation of employees. On the other hand, informal communication within state institutions confuses foreign employees, but during their stay in Belgrade some of them tend to adopt it to a certain extent and even unconsciously transfer it to their country of origin. Finally, middling migrants tend to negatively assess the lack of separation between work performance and personal life.

*"Umm... The biggest problem I always have is feedback and criticism... When someone could do better, it's very hard to give feedback. Constructive feedback. That's taken very, very personally. Whereas I think in a British or American setting we are much more able to separate our work performance from our personal lives... we can very easily compartmentalize work from personal life. So, work-related feedback isn't taken personally, it's taken as a challenge. So, you can say: 'Okay, this is helpful! Thank you very much... This is how I'm going to deal with it.' Whereas when you give work-related feedback to someone here, it's a blow to their self-esteem, it's a blow to their confidence, it's an insult... I mean, I am generalising; obviously, it's different with different individuals. But generally, I think that's one of the problems that we face in Serbia."* (RF13)

At this point, it is convenient to remind the reader that local respondents have expressed appreciation for the practice of separation between work and private life, very much insisted upon by their foreign colleagues. In this respect, therefore, middling migrants show potential for becoming successful intercultural

brokers, precisely because there is a point of overlap between a critical view of the weaknesses of the local business culture (from the perspective of the middling migrants) and a view of the advantages of an international business environment (from the perspective of cosmopolitan locals).

*Language as a Barrier for Global-Local Knowledge Exchange*

The quality of knowledge transfer is dependent on the characteristics of the media of communication, language being one of the most important (Bugarski, 2002). In the international business environment, English is definitely the *lingua franca*. This is the case in most of the international/foreign companies operating in Serbia. In the analysis of the interviews, the following language-related barriers were identified: 1) unequal distribution of power in communication; 2) cultural barriers; 3) social exclusion (see Table 1).

Table 1. Language as a Barrier for Global-Local Knowledge Exchange

Perspective of Cosmopolitan Locals	Perspective of Middling Migrants
Unequal distribution of power in communication	Social exclusion
Social exclusion	Cultural barrier
Cultural barrier	

The language barrier is reflected in the unequal distribution of power in communication as the non-native speakers of English (even though most of them are fluent in English) are placed in an inferior position vis-à-vis the native speakers, not due to the lack of expertise, but exactly because of a lack of certain language skills.

*“The language barrier can be present, especially if you are arguing and debating with someone who is a native speaker – they can easily build the arguments, and it will be harder for you.” (RD20)*

The lack of certain language skills in the group of cosmopolitan locals also has adverse effects on the foreigners. Due to their insufficient English language skills, cosmopolitan locals prefer to speak in Serbian whenever possible, which leads to the exclusion of their foreign co-workers from communication. This barrier is further reproduced in less formal conversations, as cosmopolitan locals avoid informal socialising events with foreigners, which reduces the opportunities for global-local exchange of knowledge, at both levels – professional and private – and leads to a (partial) *social exclusion* of foreigners. This barrier is recognised by both perspectives, in the form of self-criticism by cosmopolitan locals and as criticism by middling migrants.

*“Yes, I feel that language is a barrier. I mean the Serbs are not so much used to foreigners, so if we are sitting together – 4 people, 3 Serbs*

*and one foreigner, when the foreigner is speaking they will speak in English, but immediately when they are speaking among themselves they switch to Serbian and that leaves you out of the discussion.”* (RF10)

In addition to the reduced abilities to express themselves in English (due to semantic and/or morphological errors) by both cosmopolitan locals and non-native English-speaking expats, another obstacle in cross-cultural communication arises at the level of language pragmatics, which is closely related to culturally specific meanings and practices.

*“There are often misunderstandings in the sense of understanding and interpreting similar concepts in different ways... The obstacle can be overcome by more intensive communication and exchange of experiences...”* (RD15)

*“I think it’s exactly because of these cultural differences that sometimes we don’t see things in the same way and then the miscommunication happens, and a problem arises just because people didn’t understand what was meant to be said.”* (RD8)

Almost paradoxically, while our respondents believe that cultural differences present a significant barrier to communication, the awareness of the culturally induced misunderstandings can, in the long run, contribute to the strengthening of global-local knowledge transfer, since frequent problems in intercultural communication can prompt people to become better acquainted with the other culture.

When discussing cultural barriers in communication, middling migrants tend to be more aware than the local population of the taken-for-granted cultural practices and see the necessity for critical reflexivity. By realising their own lack of knowledge of the local business culture, as well as the fact that the local population is less aware of possible miscommunication in intercultural dialogue, they show potential for becoming intercultural brokers.

*“The biggest obstacle I think is on the side of foreigners. Yes. I think we often have a tendency when we are here, as experts or whatever we are, to talk too much rather than listen and use the information we receive in Serbian context. We tend to act as if this is the biggest obstacle. Again, if you don’t understand the culture you make a lot of mistakes. I make mistakes because I don’t understand everything here, but at least I am trying to do my best. When I see what is happening in the business sphere I am aware that the problem lies in us – in not listening. We are not adjusting to this culture.”* (RF5)

### *Power Relations and Knowledge Exchange*

Despite many examples of successful knowledge exchange, a critical perspective prevails in the narratives of both local and foreign respondents. The perspective of cosmopolitan locals critically re-examines the widespread assumption that global (Western) knowledge is more valuable than its local equivalent. In their statements, they try to demystify the importance of foreign expertise for local issues.

*“It is often the case that people assume that everything that is local is not good enough, and that something that is international is better. I have witnessed many times that this is not the case, and that the skills and knowledge that we possess (I mean the people who are born here, and who attended school here) very often surpass what we would expect from foreigners...”* (RD19)

Cosmopolitan locals criticise the Orientalist discourse (an important aspect of the core-periphery relations in this part of the world) i.e. presenting the West as “progressive”, “modern” and “rational” in comparison with the supposedly “stagnant”, “backward”, “traditional”, “exotic” or “irrational” peripheral eastern societies (Bakić-Hayden, 2006: 36). Cosmopolitan locals recognise a certain cultural and political domination of the Westerners in the exchange of knowledge and sharply oppose this practice. They believe that transmigrants take an arrogant stance in the process of knowledge exchange and that they tend to perform a dominant role. However, this defensive attitude, observable in the accounts of local respondents, can significantly reduce intercultural transfer and knowledge exchange.

*“I can’t say that I learned anything smart from foreigners and from their attitude towards us, and I’m not thrilled with foreigners. I’m especially not thrilled with the ones coming from Western Europe, thinking that they are God-given... Considering that foreigners mostly come here to help us, they have that arrogant attitude: ‘We are here for you, and you have to subdue to us.’”* (RD11)

One of the main features of the Orientalist discourse is essentialism, i.e. the belief that people and their social and cultural institutions are governed by natural laws (Inden, 1990: 2), and that a clear distinction can be made between “Europe in the narrow sense” and those parts of the continent that were under the Ottoman rule (“not European enough”). The rhetoric applied to that “other” part of Europe can be recognized in the following terms: Balkan mentality, Balkan primitivism, Balkanization. On the other hand, the West consistently connects itself with the “civilized world” (Bakić-Hayden, 2006: 34, 54, 55). It is this kind of essentialism that the local respondents recognise in the international business environment. They believe that foreign workers come to Serbia with a prejudice about the local population, viewing it as primitive. A negative picture of Serbia, created by the Western media in the 1990s, is still largely present in the imagination of people coming from the West (Novčić-Korać & Šegota, 2017).

*“Some foreigners came here thinking that we were eating with our hands, that we didn’t know how to add or multiply, and they started telling us some stories that are meant for children in primary and secondary schools. I mean, that’s the general perception of Serbia and Serbs in their countries, you know – that image that we carry a knife in our teeth and slaughter each other...”* (RD11).

Although one of the important roles of transmigrants, in terms of knowledge transfer, is their ability to be reflexive about the cultural practices of



the host society (Hannerz, 1996; Smith, 2001), they often come with a number of prejudices. On the other hand, cosmopolitan locals see their own attempts to confront those prejudices as a specific knowledge they share.

*“Well, I always tried to show them that they must not generalise, that they should not have prejudices about what happened in this country, and who was good or bad in the conflict...” (RD14)*

Focusing now on the perspective of foreign interviewees, the analysis detected in the accounts of some Western Europeans and Americans an open reluctance to accept local knowledge.

*“Americans probably care a little bit less about adjusting to other parts of the world. They would think of it [local knowledge] as exotic and interesting, but not useful for everyday life.” (RF11)*

While the accounts of Serbian interlocutors suggest the presence of Orientalist discourse and subordination of local knowledge and practices to the global or Western, some answers indicate a process of *hybridization*, i.e. the adjustment of international companies' business practices to the local culture.

*“...my company is a German company. When I went to the head office in Germany, my impression was that they have strict ‘German’ standards... everything is done exactly on time, there are no delays... and then I got here [the local branch] and I was like: ‘Oh my God, Serbia, you entered this company!’ [laughter] ... There is a lot of flexibility, of course it's important to get the job done, but whether it is in five minutes past two or at two and a quarter, it doesn't really matter.” (RD7)*

Cosmopolitan locals who work with transmigrants originating from other Southeast European countries emphasise the shared southern mentality, which combined with the sense of more equality, contributes to easier exchange of knowledge and experiences. In this case, the so-called “neighbourhood effect” (Kuznetsov, 2008) facilitates intercultural communication and exchange.

*“I learned to be patient and more relaxed due to the characteristics of the Greek mentality. As much as we are relaxed with that southern mentality, we should be even more relaxed, especially with some time guidelines, because there are almost no time guidelines when working with Greeks. One needs to get used to certain things in order to be able to cooperate.” (RD21)*

### *Places of Knowledge Exchange*

In this section we map the places of knowledge exchange in Belgrade, based on analysis of answers to questions about where interaction between foreigners and locals usually takes place, which places foreigners visit, or which places locals choose to show to them.

Analysis of the perspectives of both locals and foreigners showed that the most common places for knowledge exchange are either traditional local

places or globalized places. Those meeting places are most often located in the downtown area and the wider city centre (the quarters of Dorćol, Vračar and Novi Beograd), regardless of the choice of either a globalised or a local (traditional) place. Cosmopolitan locals try to offer foreigners a specific, local experience and to introduce them to traditional places in the city.

*“I’m looking for a restaurant or a cafe that possesses at least some mark of Belgrade or is unique enough to be interesting to them. If it’s a restaurant, it should of course be offering local food or something like that, or I take them to a place where the brandy (rakija) is good, just as a little presentation of Belgrade and Serbia.” (RD8)*

Middling migrants enjoy visiting this kind of places, since they provide them with an authentic experience.

*“I choose something that is typical for here, something different from what I know.” (RF7)*

In traditional places, in informal gatherings, foreigners get better acquainted with the characteristics of the local population. *Kafana*<sup>11</sup> stands out as a traditional local meeting place. *Kafana* represents a kind of extension of private space<sup>12</sup> (Fotić, 2005; Stanojević, 2010) and an institution that has preserved local values in the era of globalisation (Stanojević, 2010). It meets the needs of the so-called new service class – it provides a combination of physical pleasure (food and drink) and intellectual satisfaction (Miles & Miles, 2004; Petrović, 2009: 97). Moreover, the local population (not limited to the cosmopolitan locals) interact there with foreigners and thus these local places have the potential to become translocal.

Although cosmopolitan locals introduce foreigners to local places and foreigners get an authentic experience there, a need for familiar places (Zukin, 1998) is also present. Thus, the exchange of knowledge between cosmopolitan locals and middling migrants also takes place in the so-called globalised milieus<sup>13</sup>, non-places that offer a sense of familiarity to the foreigners, wherever they are in the world (Auge, 1997; Petrović, 2009: 95). Middling migrants in these places can easily and efficiently realise their needs in a standardised way, without a need to adapt to the new environment (Petrović, 2009: 95).

*“These are places, bars, some places that are more or less the same as anywhere in Europe.” (RD13)*

While the traditional local and globalised spaces are places of informal meetings of locals and foreigners outside the work, corporate events (e.g. corporate anniversary, holiday celebrations), formal receptions, conferences,

11 Serbian expression for the local taverns and traditional cuisine restaurants. Taverns that were mentioned in the interviews are: Skadarlija, Durmitor, Mornar, Šaran, Dren, Vuk, So i biber, Znak pitanja and Bela reka.

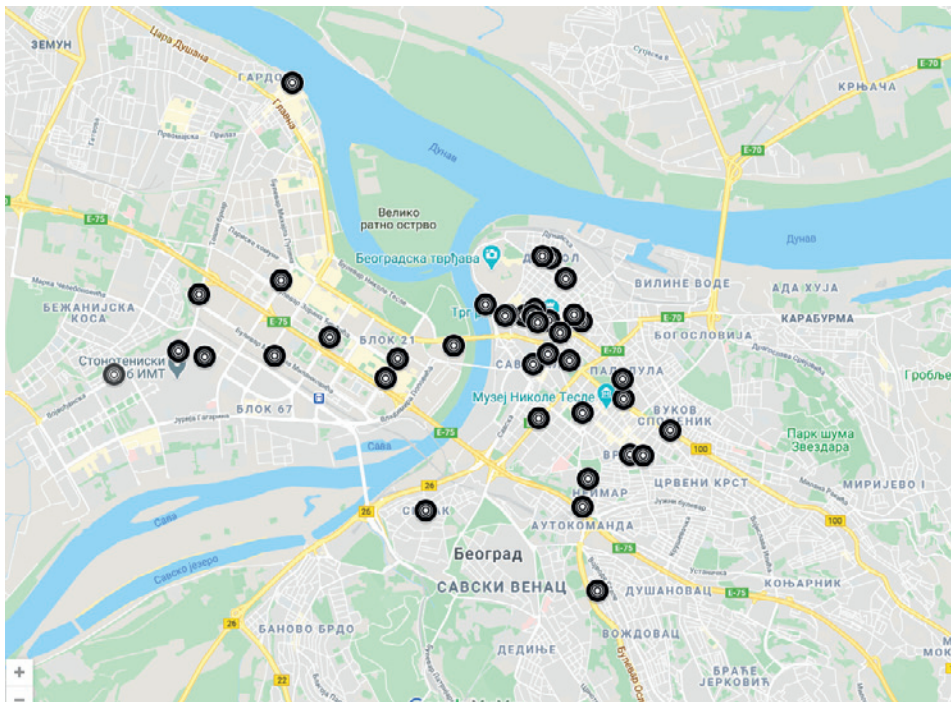
12 Traditional hospitality shown at home is moved to the public space (Fotić, 2005).

13 Globalised “fancy” bars mentioned in the interviews: Beton hala, Frida, Ambar and Franš. Globalised places of “alternative” culture mentioned in the interviews: Cetinjska, Savamala, Ben Akiba, Irish Pub, KC grad, Informbiro and Centrala.

symposia, etc. are recognized as formal (work-related) meeting places. These are often embassy buildings, faculty buildings, as well as the Hyatt, Metropol, Marriott and similar chain-branded hotels. These places also represent globalised milieus, which allow foreigners stable configurations of actions and experiences (Auge, 1997; Petrović, 2009). The choice of the meeting place is sometimes determined by the hierarchy in the organisation, meaning that more formal places are reserved for guests of a higher rank.

*“...it depends on how formal the dinner is, is it part of the official agenda... what is the status of the guest (hierarchically). If it is a regional manager, you go to a more formal, verified place, usually near the hotel where the guest is staying, at a walking distance.” (RD17)*

Figure 1 Map of Translocal Spaces in Belgrade



Analysis of the perspectives of transmigrants and cosmopolitan locals has shown that translocal spaces as places of intensive global-local exchange are diverse. Trans-local spaces emerge in the encounter of the global and the local, in the search for a different, authentic city, on the one hand, but also out of a need for urban spaces that are sufficiently familiar to provide safe experiences, on the other (Zukin, 1998; Auge, 1997; Petrović, 2009). The meeting places of cosmopolitan locals and middling migrants play a particularly important role in potentially overcoming the downsides and encouraging the affirmative aspects of global-local knowledge exchange (see Table 1). Local places encourage cultural exchange, especially by bringing local culture closer to foreigners, and are

important for overcoming the prejudices that foreigners, as analysis has shown, have towards the local environment. From the perspective of unequal power, the critique of Orientalist discourse in such places is shifted from the relationship of domination by middling migrants that prevails in the business sphere, to the affirmation and self-evaluation of the locals. Local places therefore favour the activation of cosmopolitan locals' resources in the global-local knowledge exchange. Orientalist discourse, however, can also be reproduced through the local places, through the experience of the places and locals as 'exotic'. In terms of language, these places increase the likelihood of the social exclusion (see Table 1) of foreigners. On the other hand, global places are particularly favourable for middling migrants to maintain a dominant role over cosmopolitan locals. These places protect them from the unexpected surprises of the local context and enable efficiency in performing work / everyday tasks. This is especially evident in formal (work-related) meeting places, where the significant resources of middling migrants in the global-local exchange (language knowledge, professionalism) come to the fore, since these places are accompanied by certain protocols (meetings, congresses, etc.).

Finally, it should be noted that informal gatherings of cosmopolitan locals and middling migrants take place mainly in the public space, so that middling migrants generally remain outside the private sphere of the local population (birthday parties, celebrations, family gatherings, etc.). In this way, with their presence, practices, social relations and networks, they redefine what are, on the whole, public spaces. As the interaction of external (global) forces and internal (local) socio-spatial structures and practices occurs, encounters of cosmopolitan locals and middling migrants play an important role in the creation of translocal public spaces in Belgrade.

## Conclusion

The paper focuses on the underexplored category of middling migrants in an urban context that has a semi-peripheral position in global hierarchies of power. The analysis shows that the peripheral position of Serbia, combined with specific socio-political and cultural conditions characterised by xenophobia and distrust towards foreigners, make certain aspects of intercultural exchange and knowledge transfer quite difficult. Furthermore, the ramifications of a semi-peripheral position in the global constellation of power are manifested in the accounts of local respondents as a feeling of subordination (e.g. as cheap labour, regardless of their expertise) compared with their foreign counterparts. Unequal power relations are also visible in terms of language, especially in interactions between local employees and expats who are native speakers of English. These power-related barriers prove to be a significant impediment for knowledge exchange.

The peripheral position of Serbia has also made knowledge exchange from the perspective of middling migrants quite difficult. Given the practice of *othering* (present on both sides), Orientalism and anti-Orientalism and related prejudices, the position of transmigrants as intercultural brokers is

significantly weakened. However, certain downsides of the peripheral position and local organisational culture (e.g. anti-professionalism; gender inequality at work, hierarchical relations), prove to have a stimulating effect on global-local knowledge exchange, since the cosmopolitan locals show an eagerness to acquire good business practices from their expat colleagues. The “neighbourhood effect” has a stimulating effect as well (Kuznetsov, 2008), facilitating cooperation and knowledge exchange between cosmopolitan locals and transmigrants from other Southeast European countries.

Analysis of the places of exchange shows that the central urban areas of Belgrade emerge as translocal, while the rest of Serbia and the local population remain out of the loop. Thus, we assume that translocal character of central Belgrade has a relatively low impact on the surroundings and the wider population – like an isolated island of translocality. Linkages between middling migrants and the local population are rather weak, as was the case in some other peripheral cities (Jaskulowski, 2020), and only certain local places (taverns, traditional cuisine restaurants, night clubs) are spots where they have opportunity to meet and interact. Other places belong to globalised milieus that provide middling migrants a sense of familiarity and therefore safety (Zukin, 1998). However, most of these spaces are exclusive and luxury places, not frequently visited by ordinary (local) people. The attitude of middling migrants towards places and their need for authentic experiences, as well as their need for familiar places (Zukin, 1998; Auge, 1997; Petrović, 2009) reflects their distinctiveness from the hyper-mobile global elite, as they tend to negotiate between mobility and settlement and the levels of their local integration and engagement with the local population vary (Glick Schiller et al., 1992: 1). Moving the place of knowledge exchange from the city centre to the periphery and from globalised milieus to ordinary, locally specific areas might enable middling migrants to get better acquainted with the local culture of the host society, and thus more successfully manage their role as intercultural brokers.

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