The challenges of Serbian Immigrants in Ireland

-An examination of the process of acculturation-

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Abstract

The present study is a qualitative piece of research which will explore the experiences of Serbian immigrants in Ireland and it will closely examine the potential difficulties, advantages and disadvantages caused by the individual's act of immigration. The study intended to identify how immigrants balance between two cultures, and based on their perceptions towards keeping their own heritage culture and the adoption of a foreign one, which acculturation strategy arose as a result. The data was obtained from six Serbian participants, three male and three female, using in-depth semi-structured interviews. As a result of the interviews, four themes emerged: *Being an immigrant, A comparison of life: Serbia v Ireland, Social circles and Language.* The careful analysis of the themes, led to conclusions that the most common acculturation strategy used by Serbian immigrants in Ireland is integration. Factors such as education, language proficiency and social circles were found to be the essential importance for adaptation into a foreign society.

Introduction

Experiencing immigration

The need for change and the constant search for new possibilities and opportunities has been for centuries an inseparable part of human nature (Marsella & Ring, 2003, p.3). Migration, as a constant movement of people all over globe has played a crucial role in colonialism, industrialisation and the development of capitalism, and also in reshaping every aspect of social and economic life of the host country and the country of origin (Castles and Miller, 2009, p. 1-18). As a part of the migration process, immigration is commonly seen as a movement of individuals to a new country with a goal to permanently reside there. The consequences of such a process usually contribute towards the development of multicultural societies, which as a main attribute of a modern state, lead to a rich cultural and ethnic diversity ('Immigration', 2015).

There are various factors which motivate people to migrate. According to Castles & Miller (2009, p. 21-27) the main reasons for migration are: better employment and lifestyle opportunities; escape from political and ethnic conflicts; demographic and environmental causes. Despite the fact that every migrant has specific personal circumstances, migration usually occurs as a result of a combination of push and pull factors. Factors such as lack of services, poor safety, unemployment, flooding, and war are viewed as the push factors, which encourage people to migrate. On the other hand, the pull factors attract people to move, by offering higher employment, less crime, better health services, greater wealth and less risk of natural hazards (Castles & Miller, 2009, p. 21-27).

The Immigrant Citizens Survey which was carried out in seven European countries clearly depicts the typical experiences and difficulties which immigrants have to cope with: language, family reunion, employment and residency. According to this survey, being able to reunite with the family, long term residence and job security are the key factors for achieving a sense of belonging and successful integration. The survey suggests that providing equal opportunities, recognition of foreign qualifications and increased knowledge about immigrants needs will contribute to active participation in society (Huddleston and Tjaden, 2012).

The phenomenon of immigration influences both the host country and the country of origin, by changing demographics, economic and social structures, and also through cultural diversities. Therefore immigration could be seen through positive and negative aspects. While on one hand immigrants fill job vacancies and bring innovations to the host country, on the other hand they can be victims of exploitation and racism, and they can burden social institutions and welfare systems (Castles and Miller, 2009, p. 57-67).

Based on the rapid growth of the economy and employment in the last 20 years, the Republic of Ireland has become one of the most desirable countries for immigrants all over the world. The introduction of free secondary education, the settlement of stable incomes and the rise of employment opportunities in a wide range of areas (such as IT, pharmaceutical, medicine and construction) during the 1990s, attracted a large number people who immigrated to Ireland. (European Commission, 2006). Due to the increase in immigration, the population landscape of Ireland changed significantly and caused an increased awareness of the potential issues surrounding different cultures, ethnicities and nationalities (Fanning, 2011). According to the 2011 Census, the number of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland was just over a half of a million, from which 31,3 % hold third level degrees or higher and speak more than two

languages (CSO, 2012). The number of Serbian people living in Ireland is estimated at around a thousand, which could be related to the difficult immigration process based on the fact that Serbia is not part of EU, and therefore its citizens are under strict visas requirements (INIS, 2015). Established on the fact that today's Ireland is a highly diverse country, an increased activity of voluntary and community organisations which work closely with ethnic minorities helping them to integrate successfully into society is evident. Also active measures to combat racism, through policies and media are taking place on daily basis (European Commission, 2006).

Cultural differences and similarities: Serbian and Irish

Culture as a term refers commonly to visible features (e.g., food, clothing), behaviours (e.g., language, rituals) and also psychological dimensions such as attitudes, beliefs, and values, which are inherited and transferred from one generation to another through the process of socialisation (Murray, Klonoff, Garcini, Ullman, Wall & Myers, 2014). Culture is frequently seen as a central element of self definition and being brought up in a certain nation is a prerequisite and one of the principal sources of specific cultural identity. Since humans are social beings, our behaviour and beliefs mirrors the social groups we live in, but also vacates space for personal uniqueness and a path of development (AlShakhori, 2013, p. 31). Therefore it is interesting to find out how an individual who is brought up in one cultural setting and experienced a specific 'way of life' deals with the exposure to another culture, and which inner changes might occur in order to adapt. Cross-cultural adaptation is a long term process of adjustment to a new environment, starting with an individual's insight into the similarities and differences between home and host cultures (Hall, 2005, p. 33).

As stated by Rudmin (2003), the similarity between heritage and host culture is an important factor which affects the level of adaptation. The possession of similar customs, language and 'way of living' could lead to easier adaptation and a successful comprehension of possible difficulties. On the other hand substantial differences between cultures could cause high levels of stress, loneliness and feelings of exclusion. According to the World Values Survey (2015), Ireland is depicted as a very traditional country which is reflected mostly through a practice of religion, an emphasis on strong family ties, respect for authority and marriage. 89,7 % of the Irish population is Roman Catholic (CSO, 2012), of which 45.2% attend mass on a weekly basis or more (O'Mahony, 2010). On the other hand the majority of the population in Serbia is Christian Orthodox (92%) (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2011), and religion is commonly practiced through celebrations of the religious holidays (Christmas, Easter, Patron Saint) and significant days in one's life (weddings, baptism and burials of deceased) (Blagojevic & Todorovic, 2011, p.141-146). Religion in Serbia has an everyday presence in public life, especially through politics and media, which try to spread and promote the importance of religious beliefs. Despite the high identification as Orthodox, while examining the importance of religion in their lives, the majority of the Serbian population found family, employment, friends and entertainment more important, leaving religion in fifth place, just before politics.

While comparing the ways of socialising, Ireland and Serbia could be seen as quite similar. The Irish people are seen as persistent in maintaining and passing a vibrant and lively folk culture, with great passion for conversation, stories and jokes, commonly practiced in the pubs ('Ireland', 2015). The pub, at the same time is linked to an expression of the national identity and a heavy consumption of alcohol, and today represents one of the main places for socialising (Tovey &Share, 2000, p. 371). In a similar vein, Serbian people also enjoy socialising in groups but frequent cafes or "kafanas" which play live folk music more so than

bars and pubs. Although alcohol consumption is an important part of Serbian culture it is not consumed to the same extent as it is in Ireland. Serbians place an emphasis on a welcoming environment and a friendly folk ethic with traditional and modern Balkan music and take great enjoyment in socialising through singing and dancing together in these environments.

The main spoken language is Ireland is English, however, (Gaelic) Irish has constitutional status as the national and official language of Ireland. Both English and Irish languages are derived from the Latinic alphabet, and while the wider society questions the use of the Irish language, it still remains an important part of Irish national identity ('Ireland', 2015). On the other hand, in Serbia the official language is Serbian which is based on a Cyrillic alphabet that reflects Serbian religious heritage ('Serbia', 2015).

Theory of acculturation

According to Berry (1997) acculturation could be understood as changes that occur in behaviour patterns, which take place when individuals or groups from one cultural setting try to recommence their lives in another one. As culture is already recognised as a significant factor in shaping one's identity, the acculturation theory attempts to explain what will happen with individuals, in this case immigrants, who have already 'developed in one cultural context when they attempt to live in a new cultural context?' Berry (1997) believed that as a consequence of immigration, people change in a number of ways and although a great variation exists from individual to individual, certain psychological principles could be applied on all. Acculturation could be seen as a change in the culture at group level and also a change on an individual level (Berry, 1997). Firstly, immigrants as a group are at the same time affected by society of origin and society of settlement. The term 'society of origin' relates to a closer examination of where an individual is coming from, considering language,

religion, values, political situation, potential poverty and population factors. On the other hand, 'society of settlement', depicts the general attitudes of citizens towards immigration and specific groups, and also the provision of social support and anti-discriminatory policies. Secondly, changes which appear on an individual level (also known as psychological acculturation), are linked to behaviour shifts (experiencing different language, food, changes in social norms and attitudes), stress (which might arose through experience of appraising two cultures), development of coping strategies and finally socio-cultural adaptation (which occurs through gaining knowledge and social skills, and the establishment of community relations) (Berry, 1997).

The factors such as age, education, economic status and expectations, are significant in determining in which direction acculturation will be processed. The research in 2013 showed that when immigrating at a young age, people are more receptive to the influences of the new environment and they are more prone to change in comparison with older generations. It appears that if acculturation starts in earlier periods of life, there is less risk to potential issues (depression, sense of loneliness, isolation, exclusion) in comparison with older or adolescent age, where individuals are already established or are passing through a transitional life period (Taras, Rowney & Steel, 2013).

Also, individuals who are recent migrants, or who did not spend a significant amount of time in their host country, are more likely to keep close connections with people from their country of origin, which might make them reluctant to interact with the new environment. Their distinct foreign accents and lack of language proficiency leads to categorisation, which makes the process of adaptation notably longer (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga & Szapocznik, 2010). Higher levels of education are proven to provide better adjustments and stress coping skills which are essential for successful adaptation.

Based on previous researches, the motivation for immigration is an important factor, because by being forced to immigrate, individuals could develop reactive behaviour patterns and negative expectations, which make their adaptation more difficult. On the other hand, voluntary immigrants are more proactive, but if the high expectations towards their new life and opportunities do not meet, the risk of exposure to considerable amounts of stress can occur, which will make integration more difficult (Berry, 1997).

Acculturation could also be observed from the stance of the family. Commonly the first generation of adult immigrants experience certain difficulties towards language or requirements of the society, while their children by attending schools and gaining language proficiency, comprehend these problems more easily. As a result of generational and age gaps, the second and third generations of immigrant children commonly undertake the role of 'parent' of their parents, by being translators and sources of valuable information. This interdependency could lead to various family conflicts and it could contribute to widen the gap between the parents and the host culture (Organista, Marin & Chun, 2010, p. 115-119).

Fourfold model of acculturation strategies and relevant researches

One of the most popular patterns in cross-cultural psychology, which explains acculturation theory, is John's Berry fourfold model introduced in the 1970s (Berry, 1997). The acculturation strategies which Berry proposed are concerned with two underlying issues: 1. Cultural maintenance (to what extent is it important for the individual to keep connection with the culture of origin – links to their own culture) and 2. Contact and participation (to what degree is it important for the individual to become involved in the host culture – links to the society of settlement). According to Berry (1997), individuals could express negative or positive attitudes towards both, the culture of origin and the host culture, which will

consequently reflect their behaviour patterns in everyday life. The fourfold model distinguished four different acculturation strategies or attitudes: Assimilation, Separation, Integration, and Marginalisation.

The Assimilation strategy occurs when the individual is interested in maintaining a positive relationship with the host society, while denying their own cultural identity. The Separation mode appears when an individual wishes to maintain his or her own cultural identity and avoid interactions with the host society. The Integration attitude defines the individual who is open to both cultures, and who is successfully balancing and maintaining their own original identity while being actively involved in the dominant culture's practices. Marginalisation exists when neither cultural maintenance nor interaction with others is sought. Although to a certain extent, individuals have freedom to choose which acculturation strategy will suit them the most, the attitudes and acceptance of the dominant society will ultimately influence and determine their choice (Berry, 1997).

Being confronted with various difficulties while entering a new society, immigrants commonly find different religious orientations between home and host countries quite difficult to comprehend. The research from 2007 revealed that the level of religious dedication has a significant importance in the acculturation of an immigrant into a new society. Religion plays a crucial role in the construction, preservation, or abandonment of either local or ethnic/national identities. Therefore the findings showed that a participant with 'high levels of religiousness predicted an attachment to the origin identity and culture, while low religiousness and religious doubt predicted an identification with the host country and acculturation' (Saroglou & Mathijsen, 2007).

Social adaptation in the host society and integration are also closely linked with the ability to make friends and to connect with people in the new community. The immigrants who showed

more effort and started making initial friendships with receiving community members are found to be increasingly happier in their new place of settlement. Therefore in order to feel included it is of essential importance for immigrants to stay open and embrace potential new opportunities to make friends through work, school and different social and sport activities (Watt, Ramelli & Rubin, 2010). Familiarity with the cultural expectations of the host society and a willingness to adapt are necessary to gradual integration into mainstream society.

Based on the fact that language plays a very important role not only in everyday communication but also as a resource in education and employment - having proficient use of a foreign language is crucial for an immigrant's individual and societal integration. A lack of language skills often leads to exclusion, and decreased chances for educational achievement and employment opportunities (Esser, 2006).

A research report from 2006, which was based on the acculturation and adaptation of immigrant youth settled in 13 societies, found that 36.4% were classified into an integration profile. Their successful integration involved various way of engaging in heritage and national cultures by: maintaining two cultural identities (ethnic and national), language behaviour (ethnic and national language knowledge and use), various social engagements (with both ethnic and national peers), and relationships with parents within their families (including the acceptance of both obligations and rights). The research suggested that although there is a positive role of the integration strategy, a strong orientation towards one's own cultural group is more beneficial for successful adaptation into a new society in comparison to a preference for the national society (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006).

The social context and acceptance by the host community is of significant importance for immigrant's acculturation preferences. By examining and comparing different districts within Germany, Christ, Asbrock, Dhont, Pettigrew and Wagner (2013) came to the conclusion that

a negative intergroup climate was related to a stronger desire for maintenance of immigrant's own culture and national identity. Higher levels of prejudice, lower acceptance of immigrant cultural maintenance and lower desire for building relationships with immigrants, reflect a social context with a more negative intergroup climate. Therefore, immigrants are more likely to develop a lower preference for socialising with the host society, which is directly linked to unsuccessful integration (Christ, Asbrock, Dhont, Pettigrew & Wagner, 2013).

It seems that by finding a balance between maintaining its own heritage culture and indulging positive social interactions and active participation in a community, an immigrant is on the right path for successful adaptation in society (Fereshteh, 2006, p. 178-179). Good family guidance, diverse coping and participation in meaningful relationships are essential for one's own well-being and positive sense of self.

Specific studies which were focused on Serbian immigrants and their acculturation strategies will be briefly discussed below. While examining Serbian refugees in the United States, it was acknowledged that young adults' acculturation process is much faster in comparison with their parents, and by being more Americanised, young adults feel less comfortable within their family (Lazarevic, Wiley & Pleck, 2012). This could be connected with previous research about acculturation where age is directly linked with better adaptation and openness towards the host culture (Taras, Rowney & Steel, 2013). Negative Serbian stereotypes, age and social challenges are found to be the most important factors which affected the process of adaptation of Serbian immigrants to life in Australia (King, Welch & Owens, 2010). Diminished education, restricted employment and lifestyle opportunities, which occurred after coming into the host society, resulted in participants experiencing emotional and financial hardship. This was eventually reflected in their integration, causing difficulties and isolation from the Australian community. They also expressed that their poor knowledge of the English language led to limited employment opportunities and life in which they

described as an 'ethnic bubble'. On the other hand, the results of the study of a Serbian minority in Canada, revealed that not all the immigrants experience acculturation in the same way and that the process of acculturation and adaptation to the new society is not as negative as previously suggested. Although immigrants coming from different backgrounds pass though more complex adaptation, 'they also possess certain individual characteristics (e.g., a desire to educate themselves, a desire to provide for themselves, and a positive outlook on life) that contribute to successful adaptation' (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2009).

The present study

A careful analysis of previous research, which captured the experiences of immigrants through the framework of acculturation, lead to an acknowledgment of the limited data available on Serbian minorities in foreign countries. In order to contribute and expand the field of acculturation and possibly add new views of immigration, the present research will focus on exploring the experiences of Serbian immigrants in Ireland. Therefore individual experiences, different views, attitudes and perceptions of immigration will be conducted in order to provide a better understanding of possible difficulties that immigration and adaptation into a new society carries. Bearing in mind that each person is individual and therefore each immigrant's experience of adaptation differs, this research will try to explore the most common issues that might arise.

Serbian immigrants are specifically chosen because of their national, cultural and religious differences in comparison to the Irish population. Also, originating from a non-EU country, Serbian citizens are exposed to strict Visa regimes by the Republic of Ireland. For that reason it would be revealing to discover why (despite these barriers) Serbian citizens choose to try

and live in Ireland. Hence cultural diversities, issues towards possible discrimination, language barriers and cultural challenges will be explored as well.

In addition, the previous literature was dominantly based on the acculturation process of Serbian immigrants which took place after the Yugoslavian war in the middle of 1990s. Therefore certain push factors (a war-affected area, struggle to survive) could be seen as central in the reason for immigration. The present study took place in 2015, where the political situation in Serbia is stable and progressing to joining the European Union, hence it would be contributory to discover the reasons for emigration from Serbia in more recent times.

The study intends to identify how immigrants balance between two cultures (Serbian and Irish) and which changes takes place in their everyday life as a result of it. It will also address what the most common aspects from heritage and host culture that an individual selects and integrates into its own individualised culture. The paper will explore the importance of keeping their Serbian identity (through customs, language, connection with family and friends) and adjusting into Irish society.

Four acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation) based on John Berry's model (Berry, 1997) will be examined through individual immigrant interpretations of their experience. This paper will try to establish which acculturation strategy is the most common among Serbian immigrants and the possible reasoning for this. The study aims to investigate the different views, attitudes and perceptions towards their own culture and the adoption of a foreign one.

Therefore this research will provide a greater understanding and awareness of the social difficulties that immigration carries and also the individual challenges and obstacles of residing in a 'new'- host society.

Methodology

Aims of the study

The aim of the present study is to, by investigating individual experiences of immigration to Ireland, try to gain information as to which of the four acculturation strategies is the most common among Serbian immigrants. The study is focused on investigation of individual perceptions towards Irish life and culture, potential positive and negative differences in comparison with life in Serbia and preferences in food, music and customs. The study aims to examine immigrant's everyday life experiences, attitudes and opinions, and to reveal which strategy they use for adaptation into foreign society.

Design

The qualitative research design is chosen for the present study in order to obtain data which will describe in detail personal life experiences among Serbian immigrants. Also the 'inductive and flexible' nature of the qualitative research (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013, p. 4) allowed the study not only to provide comprehensive information but also to encourage participants to expand on their responses, which allows the production of rich and in-depth data. Semi-structured interviews are used to gather information, and by doing so, the researcher managed to obtain answers from possible sensitive topics (reasons for immigration and negative experiences in Ireland) and to clarify the answers (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 330). The researcher wanted to have a close interaction with the participants, believing that by doing individual interviews, profound knowledge and better quality information would be gained.

As qualitative research is usually concerned with meanings and people's own sense about the world around them (Griffin, 2004), an open-ended question such as: 'How does it feel to be a Serbian immigrant in Ireland?' and 'How important is it for you to establish relationship with Irish people?' or 'How important is it for you to maintain Serbian identity?' were used to gain better insight into potential issues. The advantage of using qualitative methods in the present study lies in the understanding of the complex phenomena of acculturation among an ethnic minority. The qualitative research design was the preferred option because by simply using quantitative research, the obtained data would not have such detail about personal experience of the immigrants, and any additional information could not be conducted. The method is based on criterion sampling, because the selected participants needed to meet predetermined criterion of importance, such as Serbian nationality. However, the major disadvantage could be linked with a small group of Serbian participants from which the data was gathered, and therefore the generalization of the results to a wider population is limited

Materials / Apparatus

An Olympus VN-765 digital voice recorder was used in order to record interviews, which were accurately transcribed after meetings. A pen and a notepad were employed to note important occurrences during an interview, such as body language, emotional descriptive language and any extra data provided after the interview, when the recorder was switched off. The thematic analysis of the present study was carried out using NVIVO 10 computer software-which allowed the research data to be properly explained, arranged and classified. The NVIVO 10 was a useful tool which helped during the organisation and analysis of various codes, patterns and themes established throughout the interview process. It also delegated in time-consuming tasks (Hillal & Alabri, 2013) allowing the researcher to be focused more on analysis and not the process itself as such.

Participants

The sample data is obtained from six Serbian immigrants, three male and three female, who were born and lived for a long period of time in Serbia, and then immigrated to Ireland. Access to participants was gained though the email list provided from the Honorary Serbian Consulate in Ireland, and they were contacted by email through which detailed explanation of the present study and their possible participation was provided. The participants were in the range from 28 to 43 years old, with residence in Ireland no less than 3 years in length. One of the participants was living in Ireland for more than 20 years. By coincidence, all of the participants were highly educated, possessing third level education or higher. All of the participants were living in Dublin, in middle to upper class areas. Two of the interviewees were living with Irish partners with whom they had children. For confidentiality reasons, participants interviews were labelled using numbers (Interviews 1-6), and their names were not revealed at any time.

Procedure

Before the interviews took place, each participant was contacted through email, and the purpose of the present study was clearly explained. The participants were enthusiastic to be part of the study, mainly because it was related to their ethnic origin, and in order to try to help their fellow national. All interviews took place in different cafés in Dublin's city centre, at a time and location convenient for the participant and the researcher remained flexible throughout the whole interview processes. Based on the fact that all interviewees were of Serbian origin, before the start of each recording process, each of them were asked in what language they preferred to be interviewed. Because they did not have any preference, all interviews were conducted in English and each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. Each interview was constructed around eight main questions which allowed the researcher to

focus on the main areas of interest. The first two questions were directed towards the participant's feelings and understanding of immigration and the remaining questions were constructed to gain a particular knowledge which would lead to the preferred acculturation strategy. The main problem which occurred during the research was loud background noise of the particular locations where the interviews took place. The interviews were usually scheduled during lunch time, which was the most convenient for participants, but it also reflected in the crowdedness of the cafes. This in turn made the transcription of the interviews much more challenging and it slowed down the whole process of entering the data.

Data Analysis

The present study used the thematic analysis, which was found as the most appropriate path to evolve specific patterns, develop themes, and explore subjective explanations (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis gave flexibility to the researcher to categorise the primary data collected from the interviews into themes, which are found to be the most relevant and important for the main interest of the research. Themes were categorised under the following areas:

- Being an immigrant

- A comparison of life: Serbia v Ireland

- Social circles

- Language

Ethical considerations

To alleviate possible ethical concerns, which might arise during the interview process, the participants were informed that the study was a qualitative piece of research for the graduation year of a Bachelor Honours Degree in Social Sciences in Dublin Business School. The researcher fully and clearly explained to each participant the purpose of the study and that their participation on a voluntary basis was greatly appreciated and valued. It was also explained that this was a unique opportunity for them to give a personal insight into the life of a Serbian immigrant in Ireland. The confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed and before taking an interview each participant was ask to sign a consent form, which can be found in the Appendix. It was also made clear that the interview will be used for research purposes only, and the copies of their answers will not be passed to any third parties. Being aware that certain questions such as reasons for migration could cause potential sensitivity and emotional difficulties of participant, the researcher gave special attention and effort in their approach to make sure the interviewee felt comfortable sharing that part of their life.

Finally, the last possible ethical issue that might have arisen was based on the fact that researcher is of Serbian nationality as well, and personally has experienced the process of immigration in Ireland. To avoid potential bias, through the whole process, the researcher strived to be aware of personal experiences and to separate them from the research, by remaining objective and rational.

Results

The purpose of the present study was to explore immigration in Ireland, in particular from the aspect of Serbian immigrants, therefore participants were encouraged to talk about their experiences and feelings in the context of immigration and life in Ireland. Information gathered during the research process allowed the author to classify and form specific themes, which seem to be the most in common and analogous to all interviewees. Themes such as: '*Being an immigrant'*, '*A comparison of life: Serbia v Ireland', 'Social circles'* and '*Language'* will be discussed below.

Being an immigrant

Immigration as a process could be experienced in different ways, depending on factors and circumstances which lead to it and also an individual's perceptions and abilities.

While exploring the reasons for immigration, the majority of the participants expressed that their decisions to leave Serbia and come to Ireland were a matter of personal choice mostly connected with their relationship status at that moment:

> '*The main reason is that my husband got a job here, I suppose after my graduation I wanted to live with him. So at the beginning I came here to visit him, and then I decided to stay'* Participant No5.

Some of the reasons were a combination between feelings for their partner and exploring new options:

> '*Reasons were only personal. My girlfriend came to Ireland first, while I was still in army service in Serbia. And one year later I joined her. I did not have any thoughts*

about immigration. I was not then into thinking of leaving Serbia, but situation came spontaneously. And I was looking for new experiences' Participant No2.

'In the period when I decided to immigrate to Ireland I was in a relationship with my Irish partner, and we thought that long distance relationship could not survive much longer and that living together would be the next step. Also, I felt trapped in the same routine and lifestyle in Serbia, and I desperately needed a change and opportunity to explore a different options' Participant No6.

Only interviewee No1 expressed that: *'War, trouble over there forced us to come to Ireland'* revealing that although it was a personal choice there were factors such as fear for their own life and existence which contributed to that.

Coming from a different culture and trying to settle into a new society is often a life lasting process (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Qin-Hilliard, 2001, p.82), and an immigrant's initial experiences could be seen as crucial in further adjustment into a new society. Serbian immigrants in this case expressed high levels of positive attitudes and acceptance by the Irish society:

'People and country, based on my experience, are warm and friendly, generally willing to help' Participant No2.

'I like very much because Irish people are so polite, and friendly. There is no negativity in everyday situations and everything goes so smoothly. People are very patient' Participant No6.

The feeling of 'being welcome' into the new society leads to additional effort and interest by the immigrant to try harder to adjust and comprehend cultural differences. The interviewees

commonly agreed that acceptance by Irish society was most likely linked to limited knowledge about Serbia:

> *'In the sense I think that Irish people do not have many stereotypes about us, mostly because they don't know much about Serbia'* Participant No5.

The fact that the host culture is not familiar with immigrants culture of origin, could give an individual a fresh start and an ability to express themselves in the way that they find the most appropriate without any initial barriers. Also additional advantages recognised by the majority of the interviewees were: '*I posses better knowledge about other cultures'* (Participant No3) and '*possessing different experiences, coming from different culture, having different educational background, speaking another language'* (Participant No2).

Having potential advantages at the start of a 'new life' and being aware of them, gives an immigrant better self awareness and orientation in the host society, which could be successfully implemented in better integration.

On the other hand, Serbian immigrants agreed that their disadvantages in comparison with the Irish population arise from the fact that they are foreign and that English is not their first language: '*My disadvantage would be probably not being a native speaker, my accent is quite different and they notice that, sometimes that could create some barriers in a professional development'* Participant No3.

Participant No2 added: *'.. despite my whole education, and knowing an English language well, I would never be able to speak at the same level as somebody born and raised here'*.

This again strongly suggests the importance of knowing the dominant language of the host society in order to successfully adapt, because language by itself represents both a symbol of belonging and foreignness (Esser, 2006).

A comparison of life: Serbia v Ireland

Hall (2005, p.33) suggested that in order to establish life in a new society it is significant to have a good perspective of both cultures. While at the same time individuals could be aware of potential similarities and differences, the opinions and feelings over positive and negative issues in both societies are crucial in order to decide what to implement in their own life.

While comparing life in Ireland with life in Serbia, the participants agreed that stability and a much healthier society as a whole, brings them comfort and a deep appreciation towards Irish society. Participant No3 said: *'..life here is stable, most of the time you know that nothing strange or out of order will happened next morning..'*. Also while drawing on memories of life in Serbia, Participant No2 expressed: *'It is great to know that you are living in such a normal society, detached from all aggressiveness, depressiveness and negativity of spirit, which is common in Serbia..'*.

However the different temperaments of Irish people that could be seen in everyday situations, some participants find difficult to comprehend and relate to:

> *'Negative things about Irish people are related to that it is very hard to know what they think. They prefer to keep their opinion for themselves'* Participant No 6 and

> *'I feel like, that if you smile too much it's not good or appropriate, people become suspicious, they are very careful and reluctant when getting to know you. They do not like inviting people to their homes, they are very private..'* Participant No 4.

Furthermore, in order to gain a profound understanding of the differences between these two cultures it is important to have an insight into what exactly Serbian immigrants miss the most from their homeland. Based on findings, absent of Serbian mentality, friends and family, are the hardest features to deal with, while deprived of Serbian traditional belongings (viewed

mostly through religious celebrations, food and customs) the participants found easy to overcome:

> *'When you go to Serbia you are not going only for beautiful weather or food, I do miss people, whole mentality. When you see people on the street, loudness and expressiveness I do connect with that.'* Participant No1.

Participant No5 commented*:*

> *'What I miss the most are my friends and family.. In Serbia I could even call my friends at 1am and ask can we meet for coffee..'* while *'Traditional customs connected with Christmas and celebrating Slava, I would not practice here. I have some friends who would organise these things so I would go to their house, merely participating'.*

In the absence of Serbian culture, the participants try to rectify this gap by informing themselves about news and events of concern in their country of origin. For example, Participant No5 added: '*I always try to keep in touch what is happening in Serbia, news wise and music as well. Sometimes when I come back home to Belgrade my friends find me more updated than they are*'. Keeping an interest in Serbian life and staying well informed also illustrate ones effort to maintain the relationships with the home culture.

Based on an acknowledgment that religious dedication is an important factor which contributes towards immigrant's acculturation (Saroglou & Mathijsen, 2007) and knowing that the dominant religion in Ireland and Serbia differ, the opinions about this issue were examined. The study revealed that participants in general did not show much attachment to religion, stating that:

> *'I don't see myself connected with religion, Orthodox religion, which I found instant in Serbian culture, anyway'* Participant No2.

> *'I am not very religious, I am orthodox, I mean my family is, but we don't really follow religion..'* Participant No1.

Hence, not too much emphasis was put on Orthodox Christian holidays or following customs from both religions, participants were practicing what they found the most appealing and convenient in given moments, depending on their friends and social gatherings.

Food as an important feature of culture (Murray at al., 2014) was commonly mentioned through interviews. Although all of the interviewees expressed that they do not have food preferences: '*In my house, with my family we are trying to have mixed food, Serbian- Irish - world food no preferences'* (Participant No1)*, they also agreed that the lack of certain ingredients prevented them in being more involved in preparation of Serbian ethical meals: '*I do try to make some traditional dishes, but ingredients here are quite limited when you are trying to make some Serbian meals..'* (Participant No 5). In addition, life in a multicultural society, gives various possibilities, especially with food therefore a need for 'trying something new' and not putting an accent on traditional dishes is also present among participants : '*I love Serbian traditional food, and I know few dishes that I am cooking here in Ireland. But because in Ireland there are so many different cuisines available, I always like to try to cook something new.'* Participant No6.

Social circles

The ways of socialising and humour of both cultures, for the majority of the participants are found to be quite similar. Participant No3 stated: '*The common things between Serbian and Irish people is easy going attitude and approaching to people, friendliness through socialising'.* Also Participant No5 expressed: '*I love Irish humour and storytelling..' 'Even that I have different background I still could connect easily with 90% of things I hear'.*

It seems that positive experiences and the ability to link with potential similarities in foreign culture contribute to a better adaptation and social connectedness. However opinions about 'Irish drinking culture' were contrasting. Participant No2 had an outlook that:

> *'Socialising is similar, I believe. Both countries like socialising in large groups, in public places, we both like to drink a lot and how quickly you can get drunk. '*

Although for others this seemed to be an important contrast between cultures, which is hard to relate with:

> *'Irish drinking culture is very inappropriate, I am not used to see women drinking, or laying on the floor, drinking from the bottle…'* Participant No4.

> *'The Irish drink culture I find very different from Serbian. Binge drinking and simply to drink and to get drunk I can't relate with. It is too socially acceptable…'* Participant No3.

While examining the circle of friends, all of the interviews agreed that socialising with Irish people is very important, mostly because they see Ireland as their place of residence and by developing various contacts with Irish people is '*one more way to understand culture better'* Participant No5.

When asked 'Who do they socialise the most with? Who are their friends?' the majority of the interviewers replied:

> *'With mostly Irish people. Most of my friends now would be of Irish nationality, work or college related'* Participant No1.

> *'For me is very important to socialise with Irish people. My friends are mostly Irish, there are few other nationalities as well but that would be mainly through work..'* Participant No3.

Participant No2 found more comfortable to socialise with Serbian people, mostly because of the cultural and language convenience: *'My friends are people from Serbian community. When I am with them I don't need to think when I talk, on the other side I still need to think more when I use English'*

As for the potential lack of Serbian friendships in Ireland participant No6 explained that:

> *'Unfortunately Serbian people I met here were not exactly my type of people, so these friendships were mostly based on irregular café meetings. I feel comfortable socialising mostly with other foreigners and Irish people as well'.*

Although, there is a natural need for the immigrant to socialise within its own culture, linked to the sense of belonging and connection with life before resettlement, Serbian immigrants in this case emphasised the importance of intercultural relationships. Despite their circle of friends it is not simply based on nationality: *'I would not necessarily be friends or socialise with someone just because that person is Irish or Serbian'* Participant No5, rather they would prefer to feel a connection on an individual level.

Language

All participants considered themselves bilingual with a high proficiency in the English language. For most of them, their postgraduate education was based in English, which contributed to their high confidence in a foreign language and an ability to perform well in all levels of society. Bearing in mind that their residency and employment is in Ireland, they use English on an everyday basis, through work and socialising:

> *'I speak only in English here. I use Serbian language only to communicate with my family through Skype. I think I do think in English..'* Participant No3.

Considering language preference, the participant's opinions and feelings were divided. While Participant No5 stated: *'.. I prefer both. Serbian language, as my mother tongue, I speak at home with my husband. But I use English a lot with friends and work, so I do feel very natural with it..'* , Participant No1 said: *'I feel more comfortable in English, because I use English more, talking with friends and at work'.* Furthermore, although use of Serbian language was mostly linked to family intercommunication, Participant No6 felt that use of the native language helps with appropriate expression of the thoughts:

> *'I feel comfortable in both, but I guess I could express myself better in Serbian, especially jokes. Also sometimes I think that certain things that I say in English might sound too direct and too honest'.*

However in their daily lives, the dominant presence of the English language is apparent: *'I read in English a lot, much more then in Serbian..(Participant No6)* and *'I prefer to listen to the radio or to read books in English. I read some Serbian books too but I do prefer English more..' (Participant No1).* Although by being exposed to English language on a daily basis affected the participants' habits and preferences, they still show a consistent interest in Serbian language and expressed a feeling of regret towards its decline in their own usage. Participant No2 stated: *'I do not need read enough in Serbian and I notice that my academic Serbian is in decline, which I regret.'*

Discussion

By investigating the personal feelings and experiences of everyday life, the present research aimed to discover which acculturation strategy is the most preferable among Serbian immigrants in their life in Ireland. In-depth interviews were specifically constructed to cover all areas and factors that could affect the process of acculturation. Elements such as: reasons for immigration, experiences of the foreign country (acceptance or rejection), food, language and preference of friendships were closely examined, which led to the valuable conclusions discussed below.

The theme 'Being an immigrant' explored in detail immigrants insights towards their life in Ireland and the potential advantages and disadvantages which the change of the country of residence carries. The findings in this section suggested that the reasons to leave the country of origin were mostly personal, linked with their relationship status and potential new experiences, without any visible outside pressures (for example, a poor economy and high unemployment in Serbia). Voluntary immigration, based on one's free will and initiative, is essential to make a solid foundation of adaptation into new society (Berry, 1997). Hence, led by their personal choice, immigrants' approaches towards a new society were receptive and contribute to their positive experiences.

All of the interviewees emphasised the friendliness and welcoming attitudes of the Irish people, and feelings of non-discrimination and inclusion. This supports the findings of the previous studies (Christ, Asbrock, Dhont, Pettigrew and Wagner, 2013), where high levels of the acceptance in the host society lead to the successful integration of immigrants. Therefore separation, in terms of non interaction with the host society was not an option here, because all Serbian immigrants felt highly accepted and they embraced potential future social

relationships with their Irish counterparts. Also negative stereotypes and social challenges found in the previous studies based on Serbian immigrants (King, Welch & Owens, 2010) that caused lower levels of adaptation were not experienced among participants in the present study. This leads to conclusions that based on the overall immigration experiences, Serbian immigrants are well integrated in Irish society.

The knowledge of the host language as an important factor which could lead to any acculturation strategy, is also examined through the theme of 'Being an immigrant'. Although Serbian immigrants expressed slight concern of the potential disadvantages towards their foreign accent and 'inability to speak the language at the same level as Irish-born people', their English proficiency was very high, and this was reflected through reading, listening to music and news in the English language on daily basis. The proficiency in English allowed them to complete their high educational achievement and gave them better employment opportunities (Esser, 2006).

All the findings in the 'A comparison of life: Serbia v Ireland' section showed the appreciation and preference of the Irish style of living, which was seen as a life without unnecessary stress and unexpected circumstances. By being able to live in and compare 'the society of origin' and 'the society of settlement' (Berry, 1997), the Serbian immigrants experienced certain changes in perspective towards their life, and their needs and wants. The participants' origin from different backgrounds within Serbia in the present study, did not affect the adaptation of immigrants in a negative context. In fact, it contributed even more to the development of profound gratitude towards the preferable lifestyles they were lacking in their home country.

The participants of the present study did not express such a strong connection with Orthodox religion that they belong to, therefore the cultural maintenance towards tradition and

celebrations connected with religion were low. It appears that significantly different Irish holidays and religious practices appealed more to the participants, without leaving any negative effect on the process of acculturation. Additionally, low levels of religiousness did contribute to the better adjustment of Serbian immigrants into Irish society, as suggested by previous researches (Saroglou & Mathijsen, 2007). Although the participants did not actively practice traditional celebrations in their own houses, they still participated in their friend's homes, therefore assimilation as a strategy could not be applied here, because maintenance of the home culture traditions still existed to a certain extent.

Food as an important segment of cultural identification (Murray at al., 2014) could also be linked to the process of adaptation into a new society. Different cuisines and the host culture's dietary patterns make an influence on individuals' food habits and tastes preferences (Verbeke & Lopez, 2005). In the case of the present study, all participants showed no food preferences. The Serbian immigrants revealed interests in the preparation of food from their ethnic origins and also experimenting with different cuisines, including Irish. Most of the participants mentioned that they were prevented from making their ethnic dishes due to a lack of specific ingredients readily available in Serbia but not in Ireland.

In this study, it appeared that the majority of immigrants believe that the ways of socialising (related to the drinking culture, easy going attitude and friendliness) are similar between Irish and Serbian cultures. As a result, participants found it easy to adapt and evolve in Irish routines and social interactions. These findings concur with that of Rudmin (2003), where it was expressed that the similarity between heritage and host culture plays an important factor in the process of integration. Serbian immigrants expressed that possessing a similar sense of humour allow them to relate with the host culture better and to establish connections and friendships.

Furthermore, although most of the participants had both, Irish and Serbian friends, they emphasised the importance and comfort in socialising within the host community. This was in contrast with previous research obtained by Swartz at al. (2010), where recent immigrants, with a possession of the strong foreign accents, are more likely to socialise with people from their own country of origin. Although the majority of the participants of this study were living in Ireland five years or less, their friends circle was very extensive. Being able to make attachments to the local people and socialise through work and college for example, brought them a sense of security and acceptance. These findings support previous research, in which it was highlighted that the capacity to make friendships and connect with people in a new community, lead to an immigrant's successful integration in society (Watt, Ramelli & Rubin, 2010). Therefore acculturation strategies such as marginalisation, assimilation and separation cannot be applied here, simply because the participants indicated that they maintained high levels of contact with friends and family (from their country of origin) and participation in the host society.

In the current study, it appeared that the majority of the participants felt very comfortable with their knowledge of English, as a second language. The participants revealed that the use of the English language was on everyday basis, through past college experiences and present work and social interactions. The Serbian language was commonly used as well, especially among family and friends in Ireland and through various telecommunication methods with Serbia. Therefore in contrast with previous studies of Serbian immigrants based in Canada (Saroglou & Mathijsen, 2007), their Irish counterparts did not feel as if they are living in an 'ethnic bubble', they felt they had the confidence and ability to perform well at all levels in society. This confirms that the importance of successful application of a foreign language leads to the acculturation of the immigrant to the strategy of integration.

As suggested by previous researches, the age at immigration and the levels of education held tend to affect immigrants' acculturation processes, therefore these two factors applied to the present study will be explored as well. The majority of the participants of the current study were in their late twenties or early thirties when they first came to Ireland. They were already developed as individuals, had completed their education and had an employment history in Serbia. According to Taras, Rowney & Steel (2013) adolescent or older immigrants tend to increase the potential problems involving isolation, loneliness and exclusion. This was not the case in the present study. All participants seemed very happy with their choices, their life quality and social circles. They did not experience any potential difficulties or possible regret in continuing their life in Ireland. Also, the interviewed Serbian immigrants have high levels of education, partially obtained in both Ireland and Serbia. Therefore the present study supports existing literature which proved that well educated individuals posses better adjustment and stress coping skills which are essential for successful integration.

The present study showed that immigration and acculturation are inseparable processes which based on various factors affect the adaptation of Serbian immigrants in Ireland. The participants' responses, established on their experiences, feelings and behaviour in everyday life, lead to conclusions that Serbian immigrants in Ireland are fully integrated. Conclusions are reached also by interpreting data related to their language, age and educational levels and by detailed examination of their circle of friends, preferences of food, music and customs. Potential barriers commonly seen through language, religion and different cultural backgrounds revealed in previous researches, in the present study were not of significant importance. On the contrary, they all lead to even better adjustment in the host society. The findings of the present study highlighted the immigrants' full participation in Irish society, as well as maintenance of Serbian culture. Factors such as education, language proficiency and

social circles were found to be of the essential importance for adaptation into a foreign society.

Although thorough examinations of potential acculturation issues and various factors were applied, the present study had certain limitations. Firstly, all of the participants were highly educated, with high levels of proficiency in the English language. Future studies of Serbian immigrants in Ireland should possibly involve participants with different educational achievements and social status. Secondly, all of the participants were born and raised in large cities in Serbia, therefore perhaps the involvement of immigrants from rural areas in Serbia should be considered as potentially different insights could be drawn leading to a variety of conclusions. In addition a participant sample of 6 interviewees could not be considered to be representative in theorising upon all Serbian immigrant experiences of acculturation in Ireland. Despite the fact that use of qualitative research provided rich and in-depth data, future studies should consider quantitative methods based on the fact that a greater number of participants and generalisation of the results could be produced.

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Appendix

Interview sample

The challenges of Serbian Immigrants in Ireland

-An examination of the process of acculturation-

Name:

Sex:

Age:

Age at migration:

Place of residence:

Years of residence:

Education:

Occupation:

1. What are your main reasons for migration to Ireland? (or for living abroad)
2. How does it feel to be a Serbian immigrant in Ireland? (positive-negative things)
3. Who do you feel the most comfortable socialising with in the community?
4. How important is it for you to establish relationships with Irish people?
    - What part of Irish culture can you identify yourself with? (or relate to)
    - How often do you read or listen to the radio in the English language?
    - How familiar are you with Irish history, humour and ways of socialising?
5. How important is it for you to maintain a Serbian identity and cultural characteristics?
    - How do you participate in Serbian traditions/holidays? (how important is this for you?)
    - How often do you speak Serbian in Ireland? With whom?
    - What do you miss the most from Serbian culture?
6. What language do you feel most comfortable speaking, English or Serbian? Why is that?
7. What would be your food/music preference?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

The consent form

Dublin
Business
School

Excellence Through Learning

The challenges of Serbian Immigrants in Ireland

-An examination of the process of acculturation-

My name is Ivana Pericin and I am conducting research that explores experiences of Serbian immigrants in Ireland.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves an interview that will take roughly 40 minutes.

Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. If you do take part and any of the questions do raise difficult feelings, you do not have to answer that question, and/or continue with the interview.

Participation is confidential. If, after the interview has been completed, you wish to have your interview removed from the study this can be accommodated up until the research study is published.

The interview, and all associated documentation, will be securely stored and stored on a password protected computer.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the interview that you are consenting to participate in the study.

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact

Ivana Pericin,

Thank you for participating in this study.

Participant Signature: _____   Date: _____

Table of participants' data

Name	Sex	Age	Age at migration	Place of Residence	Years of Residence	Education
Participant1	Male	37	14	Dublin	23	MA Engineering
Participant2	Male	43	29	Dublin	14	PhD Engineering
Participant3	Male	41	37	Dublin	4	PhD Systems Biology
Participant4	Female	40	36	Dublin	4	MA International Humanitarian Action
Participant5	Female	28	25	Dublin	3	MA Arts Management
Participant6	Female	32	27	Dublin	5	MA Economics