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Factors Influencing the Prolongation of Stay Expatriates in Brno¹

Abstract | Brno, the second largest city in the Czech Republic located in the South Moravian Region, has become one of the most important targets for expatriates. Despite many conceptual uncertainties, expatriates refer to people who are educated and skilled workers, who are selected and prepared for job positions they move to foreign countries for in order to hold those positions for some time and then return back again. The preceding quantitative research, The Great Brno Expat Survey conducted among expatriates in the South Moravian Region, demonstrated an inconsistency between planning their stay rather on a short-term basis and, and the fact that their stay gradually changed into a more permanent one over time. It deals with the important question of what circumstances lead to expatriates prolonging their stay or leaving the city. To answer the question, we applied the qualitative research method of the World Café. The first discussion topic concerned the circumstances of the expatriates' arrival to the Czech Republic, the second was the reasons for staying or leaving Brno, and the third was the life of expatriates among local inhabitants. The research showed that expatriates mention a number of motivations as the set of factors that led to the prolongation of their stay. The original plans tend to be revised on the basis of experience and views formed during their stay in the city.

Keywords | Assigned expatriate – Brno – Foreigners – Immigration – Prolongation of stay – Self-initiated expatriate – Skilled labour migrants – the World Café

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1 Introduction

Thanks to economic development, especially over the last two decades, Brno, the second largest city in the Czech Republic located in the South Moravian Region, has become one of the most important targets of the specific category of highly qualified foreign migrants known also as expatriates. The city of Brno, which developed mainly under the influence of industrialization, when especially the textile and engineering industries underwent development, as well as the socialist industrialization and controlled urbanization after WW2, was one of the most important industrial regions in Czechoslovakia. As Ondřej Mulíček² claims, despite the limitation of its political significance, the city has preserved the status of an important centre of economic control

¹ The text was supported by the project “Expats in the South Moravia Region: Stay and Needs,” TL01000465, TL – Program for the Support of Applied Social Sciences and Humanities Research, Experimental Development and Innovation ĚTA.

² Ondřej Mulíček, “Prostorové vzorce postindustriálního Brna,” in *Město: Proměnlivá ne/samozřejmost*, eds. Slavomíra Ferenčuhová, Magdaléna Hledíková, Lucie Galčanová, and Barbora Vacková (Brno: Pavel Mervart, Masarykova univerzita, 2009).

and management. After 1989, the city underwent a significant economic restructuring processes and post-industrial transformation. This involved the status of the city, its infrastructure, the production of skilled labour, political support for the arrival of foreign multinational companies, and other factors creating conditions for intensive integration into global labour markets and the permanent inflow of highly skilled foreign migrants. People with a rather unique migration experience constitute the category of expatriates. Despite many conceptual uncertainties,³ expatriates refer to people who are educated and skilled workers, who are selected and prepared for job positions they move to foreign countries for in order to hold those positions for some time and then return back again.⁴ Yvonne McNulty and Chris Brewster⁵ examine the concept of expatriates, arguing that sloppy use of the term in the past has led to problems of inconsistent research, incompatible findings, lack of clarity in the field, and finally a lack of consensus about expatriate concepts. For the concept's delimitation it is important to identify the boundary conditions under which expatriate employment is enacted. As part of two major research streams focused on the assigned expatriate (AE) and self-initiated expatriate (SIE), there is a proliferation of messy terminology and concepts. The authors therefore offer two major insights from our analysis to guide future studies: they developed an empirically driven theory-specific statement (definition) of business expatriates and identified four boundary conditions. The first condition is that a expatriate must be organizationally employed. The second condition is the intended length of time abroad for the business expatriate, i.e., the temporal dimension. This condition is determined by the originally planned temporary nature of the expatriate's stay in the host country, irrespective of the actual length of time they are employed there. The intended length of time abroad for an expatriate can be short (1–12 months for short-term assignees, mid- to long-term (1–5 years). A third condition is whether the individual attains the citizenship of the host country. Expatriates are non-citizens and third country nationals. A fourth condition is regulatory cross-border compliance necessitated by organizational employment in combination with non-citizenship. This condition is determined by the legal context in which expatriate employment is enacted and whether people have the right to stay, and are allowed to seek work legally.

Expatriates differ from the wider category of highly skilled labour migrants mainly in the definition of the length of their stay, which tends to be planned as time-limited, usually being short, amounting to weeks, months or years at most. It is definitely not connected, however, with a permanent residence, but instead only a temporary one. An expatriate is situated in a particular job position, which they are usually sent to by their employer, with a limited possibility to influence the selected location,⁶ which then becomes their temporary home, their temporary base in an open, reflexive and uncertain labour biography, as described by Ulrich Beck as early as the 1990s. Although highly skilled migration may look, at first glance, like “successful” migration, it is affected by the dynamics of global labour markets, such as discrimination, unemployment,

³ Sarah Kunz, “Expatriate, Migrant? The Social Life of Migration Categories and the Polyvalent Mobility of Race,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46, (2019): 2145–2162, among others, describes the term expatriate as unstable and contested.

⁴ Michael J. Morley, Heraty Noreen, and David G. Collings, *New Directions in Expatriate Research* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). Noel Casteree, Alisdair Rogers, and Rob Kitchin, *Dictionary of Human Geography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Sylwia Przytuła, “Migrants, Assigned Expatriates (AE) and Self-initiated Expatriates (SIE) – Differentiation of Terms and Literature-Based Research Review,” *Journal of Intercultural Management* 7, no. 2 (2015).

⁵ Yvonne McNulty and Chris Brewster, “The Concept of Business Expatriates,” in *Research Handbook of Expatriates*, eds. Yvonne McNulty and Jan Selmer (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2017).

⁶ Expatriates can also move at their own initiative, look for an employer abroad, offer themselves on the global labour market and be the initiator of the relocation.

offshoring of skilled jobs and non-transferable degrees.⁷ This concept has significant consequences for the expatriate, for devising their life strategies, as well as for their social interaction in the new environment and socio-economic integration.

2 About the Research – the World Café

The qualitative research identified the factors that affect the transformation of a strategy that leads to more permanent forms of settlement or, on the other hand, to the leaving of the city. It deals with the important question of what circumstances lead to expatriates prolonging their stay or leaving the city.

The preceding quantitative research *The Great Brno Expat Survey, 2018*,⁸ conducted among expatriates in the South Moravian Region revealed that almost one half of expatriates (47.8%) lived in Brno for 1–3 years. More than one fourth of expatriates (25.8%) lived in Brno for five to ten years, and more than one tenth of expatriates (15.8%) lived there for less than one year. In terms of the planned length of stay at the moment of data collection, almost two fifths (38.9%) of the expatriates did not know how long they were going to stay in Brno. More than one fourth of expatriates (28.7%) wanted to stay in Brno permanently. Less than one fifth (16.1%) of the respondents wanted to stay for more than three years but not permanently. More than one tenth of expatriates (10.7%) planned to stay for less than three years. 5.6% of expatriates wanted to stay for less than a year. The future plans were affected by the fact if the respondents had a partner from the Czech Republic. Those respondents answered more often that they planned to stay permanently there (52.6%). The submitted data indicated an inconsistency between planning their stay on a short-term basis and the fact that their stay gradually changed into a more permanent one over time. The decision is also influenced by the fact that expatriates have children (e.g., the birth of a child) and are also satisfied with the income level. The life strategy transformation and the tendency to prolong the stay in the city have significant consequences for expatriates and other inhabitants of the city. Expatriates turn into foreigners living in the city for a long time and permanently, establishing families, living and working here. The quantitative research does not answer, however, the question of what the factors are that influence the transformation of the decision to either prolong the stay or leave the city. This the reason why we applied the qualitative survey to answer the question.

We followed the concept of expatriates by Yvonne McNulty and Chris Brewster⁹ in the process of the participant's selection. Our participants had to belong to a field defined by boundary

⁷ Astrid Eich-Krohm, "Twenty-first-century Trends in Highly Skilled Migration," in *Routledge International Handbook of Migration Studies*, eds. Steven J. Gold and Stephanie J. Nawyn (London, Routledge: Routledge International Handbooks, 2014).

⁸ The design of the questionnaire survey was created in close cooperation with project partners from the Institute of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University and the application guarantor of the project—Brno Expat Centre. The questionnaire was divided into several thematic areas—housing, healthcare, education system, satisfaction with various aspects of life in Brno, cooperation with agencies, insight into public institutions, socio-demographic characteristics and others. The questionnaire contained 122 questions in total, while not every respondent answered all the questions. The online questionnaire data was collected in October and November 2018 from a link (hyperlink). This link was sent out to relevant actors, participants. The online questionnaire was distributed through Brno Expat Centre contacts, social networks, information leaflets and personal links between respondents. It was also helpful to contact employers and universities. The online questionnaire was filled in by 1,013 respondents. Subsequent data analysis was carried out using the IBM SPSS statistical software application.

⁹ McNulty and Brewster, "The Concept of Business Expatriates."

conditions. They had to be organizationally employed, have a planned temporary expatriate stay in Brno, have a residence permit under the Alien Act, and legally work in qualified positions.

We applied the qualitative method—a participation research method called the *World Café*. It is a less common research method offering many group interaction advantages. In terms of methodology, we were inspired by texts by authors such as Juanita Brown¹⁰ and co-authors as Nancy Margulies¹¹ and David Isaacs.¹²

Compared to focus groups, which concentrate on one topic, the World Café enables determining several discussion topics at a time. As soon as they are defined, smaller groups are created, each of them discussing one of the topics. These groups of participants circulate around discussion tables, and a discussion on a topic has a pre-defined time limit. The participants add statements on each topic they find important and may discuss together and provide arguments. All of the discussed topics are recorded on a flip-chart by the discussion facilitator.

Physically, the group either moves to another table with a paper, or a paper is moved to another group (we chose the transfer of groups). Each group comments on each topic; upon the arrival of a new group, the facilitator at each table sums up what the previous group said. The main moderator initially explains how the discussion will be organised and sees to the observance of a time limit as well as the smooth course of the group discussion. The facilitator is present at each discussion topic (several facilitators are required), which enables the guiding of new groups through the statements that were heard earlier. The groups do not have to reach a general agreement. The goal of the method is to identify the various opinions of the participants. It creates space for acquiring a view of the relevant topics from various perspectives. If the same opinion on the relevant topic prevails, the topic in the group can be developed in more detail. The main moderator closes the discussion and sums up the results.

Thanks to the distribution of a higher number of participants into several smaller groups, all the participants have an increased chance to express their opinion on all the topics. The advantage of the method is that it enables the creation of more data for a relatively short period of time. The expressed opinions are discussed immediately between the participants with differing opinions. The participants respond to the opinions of the others, which leads to the collection of opinions from various points of view. If the same opinion prevails, it can be developed in more detail in the group. By dividing the participants into smaller groups, better control of the discussion is achieved and the transfer of opinions among the groups is enabled. The participants express their opinions on all the topics. The time and organisational demands of this method can be a disadvantage, however, as the discussion has to be well prepared and managed in terms of facilitation. It is also possible that there may be a conflict between participants with different opinions. The participants' fear to express their ideas before others and defend them and/or their unwillingness to speak in front of other people may represent a risk.¹³

Within the organised participative meeting, there were no conflicts and the facilitation did not bring about any difficulties. The discussion was held in English. At the beginning, the facilitators introduced three main topics, which were allocated to three discussion tables, with the groups

¹⁰ Juanita Brown, "The World Café. Living Knowledge Through Conversations That Matter" (PhD diss., The Fielding Institute, 2001).

¹¹ Juanita Brown, Nancy Margulies, and the World Café Community, *The World Café: A Resource Guide for Hosting Conversations That Matter* (Whole Systems Associates, 2002).

¹² Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, *The World Café: Shaping our Futures through Conversations that Matter* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005).

¹³ Brown and Isaacs, *The World Café: Shaping our Futures through Conversations that Matter*. David Vačkář and Eliška Krkoška Lorencová, "Aplikace participativní metody World Café v oblasti globálních problémů životního prostředí," *Envigogika* 12, no. 2 (2017).

of participants taking turn at each table after half an hour. The first discussion table focused on important factors that were identified by the participants as essential upon arrival in Brno. They discussed what needs and support they had and searched for, what had been shocking for them, and what they had not been able to handle on their own. The second discussion table dealt with the reasons that led the participants to stay in Brno, or, on the other hand, to leave the city. The last topic concerned the evaluation of living among locals, the success of incorporation into society and the interest in being incorporated and accepted by society. Nine participants, who identified themselves as expatriates, took part in the discussion. The structure of the participants was varied—both in terms of the country of origin, age and length of stay within the territory of the Czech Republic. The participants came from Croatia, Israel, Brazil, Russia, India, New Zealand, Turkey, Nigeria and Mexico. The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 39, and the length of stay ranged from seven months to twelve years. The group was facilitated by two moderators. The audio recording and the written transcript were subsequently analysed by thematic analysis.

3 Factors Influencing the Prolongation of the Stay or Leaving the City

The first discussion topic was about the circumstances of the **expatriates' arrival in the Czech Republic**, where the primary reason was definitely an attractive job offer. A regular income and a permanent job were ranked by the participants in the first place of importance. Help with bureaucracy and obtaining the necessary documents for the stay, which is more difficult for third-country nationals, also appeared to be essential. Since expatriates do not know and cannot speak the local language when they arrive in the city, finding a place to live is difficult for them. In better situations, housing is provided by the employer for at least the first few weeks after arrival; the employer also provides information about possible ways of finding permanent housing and/or where to ask for assistance. It is also important to know how to access the necessary information. It is easier for workers employed in large corporations which refer them to a co-operating organisation providing services for foreigners (e.g., the Brno Expat Centre). Expatriates with a Czech partner, who can help them solve problems at any time, have an advantage as well.

The discussion about the second topic, where **the reasons for staying or leaving Brno** were specified, produced various arguments. Some factors were identified as more important, some of them were identified as less important. The participants specifically emphasised the fact that Brno is a safe place where they do not feel in danger.¹⁴

For me, the reason to stay here is the low level of crime. Even though I am living in Cejl, which is known as a problematic neighbourhood of Brno, Cejl is still much safer than the place I was living before, because I am from Russia and there are a lot of places which are dangerous. And I know a lot of expats who agree that the level of safety is very high. [a participant from Russia]

Expatriates consider Brno to be a city where they can imagine establishing a family and settling for a longer period of time or forever. All the participants appreciated the low cost of living. They realised, however, that the local wages are lower compared to other European countries, such as Germany and Austria. They also discussed the housing costs, when the purchase prices and rental prices of real estate have been growing in recent years. Some discussants wishing to rent a flat encountered discrimination because they were foreigners. In their statements, they considered it a fact and interpreted it as a result of concerns about foreigners in general and the

¹⁴ This was mainly commented on by participants from countries with a high crime rate, e.g., from Brazil or Russia.

manifestation of social distance. As for the language barrier, some participants admitted they should learn the Czech language in order to integrate successfully into Czech society, which they had not managed so far.

For me, the biggest problem is the Czech language, I've tried to learn it several times. It's possible that I am very bad with languages, even with my own mother tongue, so learning a foreign language was very difficult for me and after trying for the fifth time I gave up. [a participant from India]

Apparently, not all of the participants present were sufficiently motivated, mainly those participants who work in large corporations, where they use English and have a partner, who is either a foreigner or can speak English, so they do not need to speak Czech. Many expatriates are not motivated to learn to speak Czech on a conversational level. They do not think that Czech is a world language, which they could eventually use in another country during their further career. Czech is also a language which takes a long time to learn, and many of them eventually give up the study of it. Some of them stated, however, that if someone decides to live for a long time in the Czech Republic, they should try to learn at least the basics of the Czech language.

The language barrier is also connected with difficulties in applying for the permanent residence or Czech citizenship and finding a job where a command of the Czech language on a certain level (e.g., in healthcare) is required.

The labour market in Brno is more open to foreigners, who are very well versed in IT or work in customer centres where a command of world languages is required. It is almost impossible for foreigners, who cannot speak the local language, to find a job in another sector. Other reasons for staying/leaving Brno, that appeared in the expatriates' discussions, are listed in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of the World Café topics from the second discussion table

Reasons for staying in Brno	Reasons for leaving Brno
Low crime rate and high sense of security	Lower income for the same type of work compared to other EU countries
Low cost of living	Problems and barriers connected with the language (difficulty of the Czech language and its low level of application in everyday and work life)
Geographic closeness of important cities and traffic junctions	The feeling they do not belong here, it is not and never will be their home (a sense of belonging)
Relationship with a Czech partner and the presence of other family members	Personal reasons (a need for change)
Organised and cheap transportation system, good infrastructure	Problems with obtaining a residence permit and citizenship (mandatory Czech language exam)
Family-friendly city	Limited offerings of job positions outside the area of information technology, and positions focused on a command of languages, a lack of opportunities to use their potential
Multicultural working environment	Less multicultural public space
Lively and cultural city with the proximity of nature	Drastic increase in rent and cost of housing, difficulty in finding flats to rent for foreigners
Religiously independent free city compared to other countries (such as India, Nigeria)	Lack of English-speaking health care experts
Good beer (cultural symbol)	Low-quality food, lack of exotic fruits and their high price

The third discussion topic focused on the **life of expatriates among local inhabitants**. Here, the opinions varied, and were not in such agreement as in the case of the other two discussion tables. This was caused by the varying contents of the acquired experiences. Interaction with others leads understandably to more intensive awareness of one's foreignness. An expatriate is a foreigner, who interprets the cultural patterns of the group they encounter.¹⁵ They do not change in many aspects, which were described by sociologist Alfred Schütz a long time ago. They do not try, for example, to be accepted permanently by the group they joined, they do not undergo a critical life situation and do not lose their social status. In actuality, they lose to a greater extent the natural interpretation of social life and standard "recipes" for communication with people in common interactions outside the job. The discussions revealed that it is a painful process, where the expectation that the expatriate will be accepted as an expert collides with the fact that this status does not help in common life and interactions with the surroundings. In other words, the environment does not take into account the social status of the expatriates, and the expatriates do not understand this fact. The discussants stated that their surroundings were pleasant, but that people were very formal and closed in relationships and that it took some time before the locals begin to trust foreigners and allow them to enter their private lives. The expatriates explained this unsociability as a consequence of historical events, especially Socialism. Expatriates, due to their orientation, linked social distance to ethnic homogenization of society and specific interpersonal relationships that developed during the totalitarian era. Cultural differences and their consequences were also mentioned.

People are still stuck in Soviet times, like it's changing a bit, you can see hipsters going out in Brno, which is cool, people are becoming a little bit more chill, but still there is the structured thing... [a participant from European country]

According to the participants, the locals are always open to going out for a beer together. The majority of participants find it difficult, however, to form a genuine attachment and make friends with Czech people. They feel that Czech people are friendly, can help, but are reserved at the same time. It is not a language or cultural barrier, but a perceived social distance that is considered a question of the attitude and openness to other people.

A: They (Czechs) are always open to going out for a beer. But I would say they are friendly...

B: ...but they are not friends.

A: Yes, I think it's really hard for an expat to be friends with real Czech people, I am not generalizing, but I could say that in most cases. [discussion among two participants]

Another passage points to the perceived position of an alien expatriate who cannot overcome the alien role.

I have some Czech friends who I am very close to, but I still feel that I will always be the international person that's from the outside and I will never really be their true friend. It's friendship but not a friendship like with another Czech person.

There was the opinion that even a longer stay in the Czech Republic does not necessarily mean the expatriate feels at home here. Sometimes, they are even sceptical of whether a stay for many years would lead to a sense of being settled and at home.

¹⁵ Alfred Schütz, "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology," *American Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 6 (1944): 499.

The second thing is the sense of belonging. I think that in historically closed countries in Central Europe, you can integrate, you can live your life, but I think it would take a long time before I felt I belonged here. I would like to go somewhere, where I could feel I belong and Brno will never be that city. [a participant from India, living in Brno for 12 years]

A wider spectrum of expatriate distinctions acquires many negative meanings in interactions, thus becoming significant differences. In other words, the more distinct visible features a foreigner has, the more different they are perceived to be in ordinary interaction. This has its consequences, especially in the perceived racism and xenophobia and/or in various forms of discrimination. Some participants stated the situation has been improving, primarily in the younger generations living in the city, which is more used to diversity thanks to travelling abroad.

A: Sometimes I walk around and people make monkey sounds and I just turn around and I just smile and I keep moving. [a participant from Nigeria]

B: The worst part is, it's really difficult for people like me to be invisible, everything you do is watched, every small mistake you make is magnified. [a participant from India]

Some people try to present a positive image, but many of them lose their motivation and give up after some time. During the period of the migration crisis, when the topic of foreigners was mentioned in the public space—in the media, political campaigns—it was a bit worse. Foreigners were presented as people the locals should be afraid of, which was in contrast with the positive self-perception. There were expectations that knowing cultural patterns should not concern expatriates alone, but that normal members of society should as well who, however, think that they do not need such familiarisation for their social existence.¹⁶

Some time back before the whole immigration issue [...] if I divide Brno before 2012 and after 2012, so when I first came here, I was actually considered more as someone exotic, so people didn't know anything about me, I was different and they wanted to get to know me, but after this immigration stuff happened, they began having these prejudices. I never noticed the prejudices before 2012, for them I was a guy who came from a different place and they were curious [...] I was considered different but not in a bad way [...] after the immigration thing and after the propaganda in the media, it's more prejudiced, they already know you are like that [...] then you are trying to change the negative perception. [a participant from India]

At the same time, they are opposed to being called expatriates. The use of this designation has negative consequences, primarily because it creates a special category which is separated from the inhabitants of the city. Nevertheless, many of them consider themselves local inhabitants and do not think they differ from the others. In this interpretation, it is apparent that the term is not definitely a neutral migration category,¹⁷ but a category that expresses power and economic relations.

Also the word expat, why does that even exist? [...] Just by saying that, you are already officially separating people here from each other. Like I want to be known by who I am, by my personality and what I do and not by the fact that I am an expat. [a participant from Israel]

¹⁶ This comment is a stimulus for a number of new approaches to integration. E.g., Roman Baláž and Lucia Čemová, "The Mainstreaming of Integration Governance and Social Work in the Local Integration of Immigrants," *Social Work Eris Journal* Winter no. 1 (Winter 2019): 94–110 focus on how to use a theoretical concept that would support the building of bridges between different actors in the process of immigrant integration (mainstreaming of integration governance) and social work is presented as an important tool for "bridging" members of society.

¹⁷ Kunz, "Expatriate, Migrant?" 2145–2162.

4 Conclusion

According to the general definition, expatriates should plan their stay on more of a short-term basis, actually staying in the city for a shorter period of time, but some quantitative data indicates a tendency towards more permanent forms of stay.

The quantitative research only enables, however, a verification of a few hypotheses; on the level of understanding the motivation of expatriates, we find much wider structures of motivations. The qualitative research indicated that expatriates refer to many motivations as the set of factors that led to the prolongation of their stay. The perception of Brno as a city where one can live a good life is crucial. It is evident that the original plans tended to be revised on the basis of experience and opinions created during the stay in the city. Some participants can imagine staying in the city for a long time and do not even reject the idea of starting their own family. This idea gradually changes into practice, which leads to longer forms of stay. This is also supported by a gradually improving awareness, which enables expatriates to get their bearings better and faster. This is also thanks to social networks and consultancy from organisations providing services for foreigners, and the assistance of large corporations, who are gradually employing more foreigners. As a result, more information in various forms is available, even prior to arrival in the country. Assistance with bureaucracy and obtaining various documents is essential. Institutional help (corporate, non-profit, general) influences the strategies of settling in the city. There are many reasons for staying in the city and for leaving it. People staying in the city are motivated by the feeling of safety, the low cost of living compared to foreign countries, the geographic location of Brno, the good infrastructure, family-friendly environment, religious freedom and the cultural life. On the other hand, the lower pay, difficult language, difficult adaptation, fewer opportunities to make a career and the growing costs of living are demotivating. According to their interpretations, despite the declared effort to become “ordinary” inhabitants of the city, expatriates are still foreigners. It is difficult and takes a great deal of time to overcome barriers; expatriates feel they need to break free of the perception of foreigners as a threat. They say it depends not only on their behaviour but also on the understanding of other inhabitants of the city. This is one of the reasons why they may refuse to accept being labelled as expatriates, which evokes instability, volatility and maintaining the otherness of foreigners, who have not been foreigners for a long time already.

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