

A “Good Enough” Choice: Bounded Rationality in Migration Destination Choice

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The study intends to fill a gap in the literature on migration destination choice, which focuses on the outcome of a decision process, while largely neglects the very process of arriving at an outcome. Using qualitative material collected during 150 face-to-face interviews with Polish migrants to four EU countries and Australia, this article develops a general typology of decision makers involved in choices of migrant destinations. It applies the concept of bounded rationality to analyse the ways in which these migrants have chosen their host locations and, focusing on their rationality, explores manifestations of its boundedness. It also discusses the issue of information search by destination choice, showing that under relatively low perceived risks associated with migration, the process of knowledge building tends to be based on experience rather than on in-depth research.

Keywords: migration, destination choice, process, bounded rationality, typology

1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world, decision-making may pose a challenge for individuals confronted with multiple alternatives and a multitude of information sources of variable reliability. People faced with a choice between several alternatives under conditions of complexity and uncertainty often act differently than an exhaustive calculation of all costs and gains would suggest. An example of such a multiple-discrete choice situation that is of particular interest to migration scholars is the migration destination choice. The widest choice of destinations, potentially leading to more complex choice situations, arguably applies to North-North migrants, especially the

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highly skilled, who are likely to enjoy the greatest freedom of cross-border mobility and may potentially choose from the widest spectrum of destinations (Tabor et al. 2015). Following Poland’s accession to the EU, Polish citizens have joined the privileged group of North-North migrants. This, and the scale of migration of Poles relative to citizens of other countries that joined the EU in and after 2004, makes them an interesting case study with regard to destination choice decision-making.

Destination choice has mostly been studied from a quantitative perspective. This strand of research includes a multitude of studies, among others, based on place utility theory (Wolpert 1965; Baker 1982), which apply such well-established methods as econometric gravity models to aggregate data and behavioural or agent-based models of migration to microdata (Pellegrini & Fotheringham 2002; Klabunde & Willekens 2016). The existing scholarship has put little emphasis on the processual side of destination choice decision-making (cf. Adams 2004), while Smallman and Moore (2010) argue that the adoption of a process-focused approach may be a ‘valuable adjunct’ to the current body of knowledge (see also Svenson 1979). Compared to the research on consumer choice behaviour and tourism destination choice, the course of the process of decision-making has received even less attention in the literature on migration (a notable exception is the study by Tabor et al. (2015)). Quantitative migration research has traditionally focused on outcomes of decision processes rather than on the processes as such (and though much rarer, so do qualitative studies, e.g. Sue et al. (2018)). Qualitative research has generally shown surprisingly little interest in migration decision-making (Morawska 2018). Consequently, there is a considerable gap in knowledge as to how migrants go about the simplification of complexity of a choice situation concerning destination selection. To close this gap in existing research is important for theoretical purposes. As Williams and Baláž (2012) argue, exploration of the nature of bounded rationality in migration decision-making is a promising venue of inquiry, which can potentially inform the discussion on migration and risk.

The purpose of this article is therefore to broaden the existing scholarship by providing a qualitative perspective on decision-making *processes* associated with migrant choices of destination. Based on in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 150 Polish nationals residing in four EU countries and Australia, the study explores *how* these mostly post-accession migrants made their host country choices. On that basis, the paper proposes a general typology of decision makers involved in migrant destination choice. Referring to Simon’s (1956, 1972) notion of bounded rationality, the paper focuses on actors’ rationality and identifies manifestations of its boundedness, including the heuristics used, dependent on the type of decision maker. Importantly, the typology is based not on exact reasons for choosing a particular destination (as it was the case e.g. in Tabor et al.’s (2015) study), but rather on ways of arriving at a final choice, and was conceived to reveal the variety of manifestations of rationality boundedness in migration destination choice. The study discusses ways in which the

process of destination choice diverges from an objectively rational multiple-discrete choice model, which presupposes choice between multiple alternatives based on multiple criteria under conditions of perfect information.

2. Theoretical underpinnings

Scholarship on the choice of destination in migration, much like almost any theory of decision-making, sits at the intersection of two research strands – economic and psychological. Classical and neoclassical models of migration decision-making, based on the rational choice approach, assumed decision makers to have knowledge about available alternatives prior to making a destination choice (the ‘perfect knowledge’ assumption, Baláž et al. 2016) and to act according to the utility maximisation principle. The more recent literature relaxes the assumption of perfect information and rationality. It acknowledges that decision makers should be viewed as boundedly rational.

The concept of bounded rationality incorporates constraints arising not only from the incompleteness of accessible information but also from the limited information-processing capacities of the decision maker (Simon 1956, 2000). Contrary to what neoclassical economics assumes, it posits that people rarely act, or are rarely capable of acting, as expected utility maximisers. Under conditions of complexity and uncertainty, they tend to resort to various coping strategies and shortcuts, such as satisficing, i.e. selecting a satisfactory alternative that meets a certain aspiration level. As Simon (1956) put it, individuals find it enough to *satisfice*, while they do not in general *optimise*, i.e. they rarely reach for a strategy that will guarantee them ‘at least as good an outcome as any other’ (Simon 1972). Consequently, one may distinguish between objective (expressed by optimising) and subjective (bounded, expressed by satisficing) rationality (Simon 1982). The latter is understood to be a product of the complexity of the external world and constraints and processing capacities of the subject. In a multiple-discrete choice situation, this may be put as follows: an objectively rational actor takes into account all existing alternatives and information on them, while a subjectively (boundedly) rational actor in various ways limits both the set of alternatives under consideration as well as information gathered about them. By applying a narrow, i.e. stricter, objective definition of rationality, we tend to too easily assess behaviour as irrational (Boudon 2008). Simon’s research on bounded rationality has been further developed at the intersection of psychology and behavioural economics by Tversky and Kahneman, who systematically explored biases from the assumptions of the rational-agent model (Kahneman 2003). As they showed, a bias may result from the use of heuristics, ‘rules of thumb’ utilised to facilitate the decision-making process. The present study fits into these strands of research and acknowledges the existence of bounded rationality, exploring ways

in which it manifests itself and, in particular, how this manifestation depends on the type of decision maker.

Research on migration decision-making tends to differentiate between reasons for migration per se and reasons for the selection of the host destination (DeJong & Gardner 1981), though allowing for the possibility that the two decisions are made simultaneously (Roseman 1983). Studies on migration destination selection show that it rarely takes the form of an extensive search through one's 'search space' (Brown & Moore, 1970) and usually the set of alternatives that are considered is small (Roseman 1983; Tabor et al. 2015). Roseman (1983) sees destination selection as a life-long, partly implicit process. According to him, people tend to run a 'stock' of potential destinations, which is continuously updated. Consequently, at a given point in time, the number of feasible migrant destinations to consider is relatively small. By addressing the research gap described in the previous section, the present study aims at developing these theoretical claims further.

3. Poles on the move

Poland has traditionally been an emigration country. Even under the communist regime, which strictly regulated foreign travel, it was not 'a country with no exit' (Stola 2012). The migration of Poles turned into a mass phenomenon in the 1980s. During the post-communist transition period, Poles primarily moved to Germany, USA, Italy and the UK (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski 2009). After 1989, the nature of their migration gradually changed from permanent migration, dominant under the socialist system, to temporary labour migration (Kaczmarczyk 2006). A turning point for the mobility of Polish citizens was Poland's accession to the EU in May 2004, which guaranteed them freedom of movement within Europe. According to the data of the Polish Central Statistical Office, one million Poles were abroad for longer than two months at the end of 2004, while the number of Poles staying abroad for over three months amounted to over 2.5 million at the end of 2016 (CSO 2017). Initially, in 2004, only Ireland, the UK and Sweden opened their labour markets for citizens of the newly accessed states, including Poles. Nevertheless, due to a number of bilateral agreements signed in the early 1990s, labour migration of Poles to the more 'reluctant' countries was possible and not rare before these countries fully opened their labour markets. In the next seven years, the remaining EU-15 countries followed in the three pioneers' footsteps, Germany and Austria being the last to open their doors in 2011. The Netherlands joined this group in 2007, becoming one of the three most popular destinations for Polish migrants within the EU as of 2016 – after the UK and Germany, and before Ireland (CSO 2017). In contrast to the EU member states, emigration to other, more distant Western countries, such as Canada, USA and Australia, although still popular, has required migrants to overcome more formal obstacles.

4. Empirical data

The analysis is based on 150 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted between June 2017 and February 2018 with Polish migrants residing in five destination countries: Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK and Australia (30 interviews in each country). These qualitative interviews were part of a larger research project focused on wealth building and management in migration-related decision-making.² The selection of four EU destination countries for the qualitative part of the project was driven by its quantitative part, which used bi-annual migrant surveys conducted by the Polish National Bank in these four main host destinations for Polish post-accession migrants. Australia was added as a distant, traditional emigrant destination, for which considerable data on Polish migrants was available. It was intended to contrast decision-making processes associated with intra-EU free movement of workers and residents with those involved in traditional, often unidirectional emigration.

Interviewees for the qualitative part of the project were identified using the conventional ‘snowball’ approach supported by assistance from Polish migrant associations and Polonia (diasporic) organisations, as well as access to potential informants through social media, e.g. Facebook thematic groups. An effort was made to assemble a diversified group in terms of age, gender, education, family status and length of migration experience. Given the thematic focus of the wider research project, the sample was biased towards skilled, professional migrants who were more likely to accumulate and manage wealth. The target group was additionally restricted to those who have spent no less than two years in their current country of residence and have had at least some work experience while abroad. The EU sample was dominated by post-accession voluntary (i.e. self-selected) migrants, which reflects the actual structure of the population of contemporary Polish migrants in the EU by migration type and time of arrival – based mostly on voluntary post-2004 arrivals. The interviewees consisted of 88 women, 58 men and 4 mixed pairs. The mean age in the sample was 39 (range 24 to 73).

Most of the interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis; only 12 (two interviews in the UK and 10 interviews in Australia) took place via Skype. Each interview was recorded, transcribed and coded (the paper’s author was the only coder of the data for the sake of this analysis) using MAXQDA software.³ The current

² The preparation of the interview guide for the qualitative study was a collaborative work of the project’s team, comprising Ewa Cichocka, Barbara Jancewicz and the author under the supervising role of the project’s leader Stefan Markowski. The field research in the five countries was performed by Ewa Cichocka (who played the leading role as a coordinator of the whole field research and conducted interviews in Germany, Ireland, the UK, the Netherlands, as well as Skype interviews with Polish migrants in Australia), Barbara Jancewicz (interviews in Ireland and the UK) and Katarzyna Kwapisz Williams (face-to-face interviews in Australia).

³ An exception were four interviews in which the informants did not agree to be recorded – these interviews were documented based on notes prepared by field researchers.

study is exploratory in nature and the analysis of the interview transcripts is based on grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss 1967), in which the proposed types emerge from the data based on an explorative, close follow-up of the decision-making process. Initially, I screened each interview for the presence of criteria for choosing a particular destination and coded them by means of a number of codes. These codes included, *inter alia*, earlier migration experience (of the respondent him/herself, of his/her family members, in the same location, in other locations), family roots, formal issues/labour market opening, social capital/social ties, partner, language, work/contract, geographical proximity, special merits of a particular city, climate, emotions and other. Separate codes were used to code fragments relating to the presence of the first step of a decision process (a decision to migrate), alternative destinations considered, information use and further migration plans. Based on the configuration of the codes (criteria for choosing a particular destination) for each interview, I then grouped interviewees into three main emerging types of destination choice decision makers.

In this paper, each excerpt from a particular interview concludes with an indication of the informant's gender (coded as F for females and M for males), age, country of residence and year of arrival at the current destination. While translating the quotations from Polish into English, I attempted to preserve the respondents' style of speech and added some additional explanations in brackets, where needed, to facilitate understanding of a particular statement.

Informants were asked questions about their migration experience, e.g. what factors influenced their decision to migrate and their choice of destination (including, where appropriate, alternative destinations considered), their present activities while abroad and potential future migration plans. In case of repeat migrants, additional information on their previous migration decisions was also gathered.

The study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, it must be borne in mind that, although the sample was large by qualitative standards, it was not a random sample and thus some subgroups of the population of Polish migrants in the studied countries may have been missing from the sample. The non-random nature of the sample and its skewness towards well-educated individuals resulted in underrepresentation of low-skilled migrants. One may presume, however, that the latter are less likely to represent the type of multiple-criteria decision makers, especially the (sub)category of decision makers taking an 'analytical' approach while selecting their destination, than highly skilled migrants. Second, as this study takes a retrospective view coupled with a cross-sectional research design, it is important to be aware of potential hindsight bias, such as a recall bias, as well as the fact that knowing the consequences of decisions taken, people tend to rationalise and reconstruct their previous predictions. Consequently, what we have is not an objective picture; rather, it is a reflection of how they interpret their decisions in retrospect (and people tend to make a "good story" out of their life courses). It is

also important to note that an interview is often their first opportunity to reflect on their experience. Third, the study is limited to ‘successful migrants’, i.e. those who migrated and were still residing abroad at the time of the study, and therefore did not include those who fell out during the course of the decision-making process, for instance those who, having made an in-depth research regarding possible destination(s), decided to remain in Poland. Fourth, the paper’s author was the only coder of the data in the present study, while ideally qualitative material should be analysed by a group of researchers. This entails some degree of subjectivity and a potential of experimenter bias.

5. Typology of destination choice decision makers

By constructing a typology of destination choice decision makers, one may think of several attributes that form an attribute space allowing division of decision-making processes into different types. These may include the sequence of decision steps⁴, the number of criteria driving the choice between alternatives, timing⁵, a decision unit (individual or group), etc. However, not all of these attributes are equally relevant in terms of boundedness of rationality. The proposed typology generally disregards the third, temporal aspect, and the fourth, which relates to the decision unit. This is because it is difficult to evaluate both of these in terms of rationality, i.e. it is not clear which sequence (whether-when-where vs. whether-where-when) or which decision (individual vs. collective) should be valued as more rational in objective terms. Although the proposed typology may seem to include only individual decision makers, I acknowledge the theoretical assumptions of NELM (Katz & Stark 1986; Lauby & Stark 1988) that the process of destination choice is often of a collective nature. Thus, by a decision maker I mean a decision-making unit, which may be either an individual or a group (e.g. family or friends).

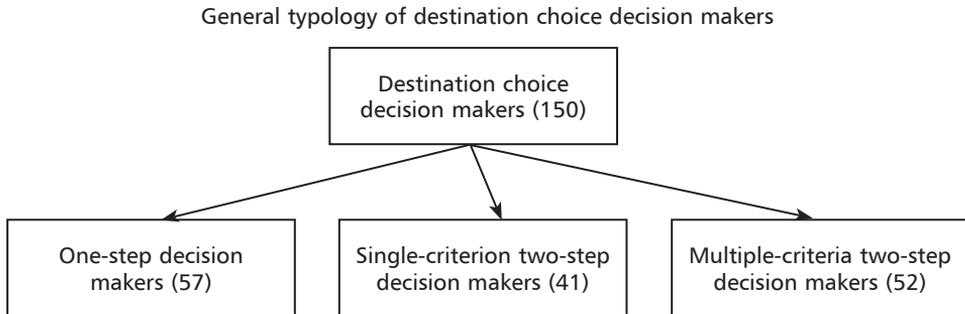
As previously mentioned, it is assumed that an objectively rational destination choice would include a separate *where* step allowing one to consider multiple different locations and a multitude of criteria according to which the multiple alternatives under consideration are rated. In practice, a decision process may diverge from this, as shown by the empirical material, either through lack of a first step, i.e. a separate decision to migrate, and thus also entailing an absence of choice between several alternatives, or through use of a limited number of criteria (one in the most extreme case) when choosing between the alternatives in the second step. Hence, the typology proposed here is based on the number of decision steps involved (one or two) and

⁴ That is, whether a decision as to whether and where to migrate was taken in a single step or fragmented into two separate steps (decision points).

⁵ Tabor et al. (2015) note that a prospective migrant has in fact three and not two major decisions to make: whether, where and when to go.

the number of criteria (zero⁶, one or more) used in choosing among the alternatives under consideration. The resultant general typology involves three main types of decision makers: *one-step decision makers*, *single-criterion two-step decision makers* and *multiple-criteria two-step decision makers* (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.



Source: own elaboration

The subsections below briefly describe each emerging type.

5.1. One-step decision makers

A particular type of migrants are those whose decision-making process involves only one step, i.e. for whom the decision to move and the choice of migration destination are inseparable – which in fact means that these decision makers do not make an explicit choice between several alternative destinations. Although the sample was not intended to be representative, it is worth noting that a considerable proportion of informants (57 out of 150) acted according to a one-step model.

Among the respondents in the sample who can be labelled as one-step decision makers, two distinct categories may be identified. The first are people who felt a connection with a particular country, for example because they had migration experience or family roots there, or a profound interest in its culture, history or natural resources. This also includes Poles who entered into intimate relationships with foreign partners. The members of this category may be labelled *primed one-step decision makers*. They often stated that migration to this particular country was a ‘natural choice’ for them. In other words, their decision to migrate to a given country was not accidental. Where this category of decision makers is concerned, we may often seek the basis for their ‘relatively spontaneous’ migration decision in their willingness to migrate to a particular country that they had experienced at an earlier stage in life.

⁶ Zero stands for a situation in which the decision process does not involve a choice between different alternatives.

Some, though they had abandoned the idea of migrating at an earlier stage in their lives, eventually made a one-step decision when a concrete opportunity unexpectedly occurred.

The second category distinguishable among one-step decision makers consists of those who had not considered migration (to a particular country or in general) prior to the emergence of a necessity or an opportunity to move to a particular country – e.g. in the form of an attractive job offer, or encouragement to migrate from a friend or a relative living abroad (we may call this category *unprimed one-step decision makers*). Importantly, in contrast to primed one-step decision makers, these migrants did not have any significant connections to the country in question that predetermined their decision in favour of this particular destination. In the sample, these included a young woman who decided to move to Dublin to take care of her pregnant cousin (not having visited her cousin even once before and not having any personal connections with the place), a man who applied for a job advertised in a newspaper without being aware that this job offer entailed moving abroad, but also people who accepted transfers within their companies or foreign work contracts when recruited by headhunters. Thus, this category involves individuals who were relatively passive in the migration decision process. They took the chance, not even having considered alternative destinations, as described by an interviewee who decided to take part in a recruitment process for a position in the Netherlands at the invitation of a headhunter:

At some point, I got a call from a headhunter. (...) An option for the Netherlands popped up. (...) I think from LinkedIn, I don't know where the headhunter found me. We wanted to move to Warsaw, i.e. closer to the centre, so why not another city. It turned out that our older daughter has allergies and that we should change the climate for a more humid one. We could not find a school in the area [in the Warsaw city centre] and so it came out. (...) This was an absolutely spontaneous decision. (M, 35, Netherlands, 2014).

Some unprimed one-step decision makers (as exemplified by the quote above) may be termed *unintended migrants*, to borrow a phrase from van Dalen and Henskens (2013), or *accidental migrants* (Kelley 2013; Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014), as they had not even considered migration before an opportunity appeared. Others might have been unprepared for this particular choice but not for migration in general. Like some primed one-step decision makers, their unprimed counterparts might have considered migration at an earlier stage in life – however, without specifying the destination or considering an alternative one – and made a spontaneous decision when a satisfactory opportunity suddenly emerged.

It is not easy to interpret a decision taken within a one-step model in terms of rationality. For some individuals, especially in the first category – those who label their choice as 'natural' – it may be perceived as deliberate and rational, as it allows them

to take advantage of the destination-specific social capital they possess and minimise the risks related to migration. It is less straightforward for the second category, whose decision is rather spontaneous and to a great extent based on coincidence.

5.2. Single-criterion two-step decision makers

Single-reason decision-making is an example of a satisficing (fast and frugal) algorithm according to which a decision is made based on a single, good reason (Gigerenzer & Goldstein 1996). The individuals in the sample who had based their destination choice on one single criterion (41 persons) were mostly people who, having decided to leave Poland, managed to acquire a satisfactory work contract in a given country, had social ties to a particular country, or had experience in a specific country. Hence, the criterion used in choosing a destination may be the same as that used by one-step decision makers, and consequently we may analogously distinguish between *primed* and *unprimed* single-criterion two-step decision makers. The difference between the respondents of this type and one-step decision makers lies in the presence of a separate step – a decision to leave Poland – followed by a choice between several alternatives.

The empirical material shows that the reason on which the decision of single-criterion decision makers is based may in certain cases have little in common with evidence-based decision-making. This is the case when, for instance, a decision maker adheres to the recognition heuristic, i.e. chooses the recognised alternative in line with the recognition principle, which entails an expectation that the recognised object has a higher value with respect to the criterion considered (Gigerenzer & Goldstein 2011). The UK migrant quoted below, a single-criterion two-step decision maker, may serve as an example:

After some consideration I found that these ideas of mine go to waste [in Poland] and it is best to use these ideas of mine here in London (...) I have always associated London with many possibilities. (...) The chaos of this place and the fact that it attracts the best talents from the whole world, not only from Europe, from the whole world, it is unbelievably magnetic. (...) If you want to play with risk in your life, then London, in my opinion, offers the best benefits, the greatest return on investment of this risk. (...) Here it is permanently, as regards the Internet and Internet-related businesses, permanently surging, chaos. And from this you can gain the most. (M, 38, UK, 2006).

One may ask why London should be the best place to make use of one's talent – what, for instance, about New York, Berlin or Silicon Valley? Naturally, such a perception of London is subjective, based on internal convictions of the interviewee, which, in turn, might follow from cultural constraints, namely 'migration culture' (White 2011) from Poland to the UK. Despite its apparent boundedness, it has to be borne in mind that the recognition heuristic is a version of single-reason decision-making

that may exploit one's lack of knowledge. Under certain circumstances, it may lead to the counterintuitive less-is-more effect and as such it may be viewed as making positive use of one's ignorance (Goldstein & Gigerenzer 1999).

5.3. Multiple-criteria two-step decision makers

Migrants who used more than one criterion to choose their migration destination from among several alternatives under consideration often resorted to hierarchical decision-making, which involves sequential elimination by subsequent attributes (Tversky 1972), arranged by importance, following a 'funnel-like procedure' (Sirakaya & Woodside 2005). For instance, a prospective migrant first narrowed down the set of alternatives to English-speaking countries, then selected one of them based on a secondary criterion (e.g. geographical distance) or several criteria (e.g. first geographical distance and then climate). In this sense, they followed a more complex decision-making model than one-step or single-criterion decision makers, as they not only compared several alternatives but also took into account more than one criterion when choosing between them. Nevertheless, multiple-criteria decision makers are not free of heuristics and cognitive errors. Like single-reason two-step decision makers, their choice is often culturally constrained. Some criteria used to limit the set of alternatives under consideration might have an implicit, subconscious character. For instance, even if a decision maker did not explicitly mention formal issues connected to emigration to particular countries among his criteria for destination choice, the existing migration culture of Poles may have implicitly influenced his decision. It thus seems that people tend to underestimate the decision-priming step. Moreover, some of the criteria applied by multiple-criteria two-step decision makers seem to be very peculiar and not applied one by one in a rigorous manner. This is how two of the informants portrayed their destination choice:

So the choice was easy: we go to an English-speaking country, the US, England, Australia, you know. So these were these kinds of choices. No, not the US, because it is not so cool there, because these corporations are the same, England – too close and too cold. We're going to Australia, because we don't know anything about it, because Australia is something ... simply a great mystery, an open country, someone said it's cool there. So these were these kinds of decisions. (F, 45, Australia, 1998);

At that time, the options were England, the Netherlands or Ireland. Since I spoke English quite well, and I always felt somehow that what is number one is not necessarily the best, but sometimes it's number two that is better. This way we chose Ireland. Looking at the size of the country etc. It was not this kind of decision that we wanted to go to Ireland very much. We simply had to go, find a job and we somehow came up with the idea that Ireland would be fine. (...) This was not a fully rational decision and fully thought through. This was an irrational but delicate aversion to England. Perhaps resulting from the fact that everyone was going to England. (M, 33, Ireland, 2005).

Importantly, even among this group, the destination choice rarely seems to have taken an 'analytical' form, in which an individual or a family effectively engaged in a decision process, i.e. sat down and not only considered but also effectively compared existing alternatives based on available information. Instead, the sequential elimination often takes the form that is far from being based on a thorough analysis of available information, as exemplified by the two quotes above.

6. Information-based decision-making?

The empirical material shows that even though people do usually have access to numerous information sources to aid their destination choice, they rarely embark on an active search before making their choice. This seems to be in opposition to the findings of Adams (2004), according to whom both the decision outcome and the decision-making process regarding migration tend to be shaped by 'the late modern reliance on information' (p. 476), which, in her opinion, may be interpreted in terms of the growing influence of rationalization in people's lives. The interviews show that regardless of the type of destination choice decision maker, the actual search for information on potential destinations is often restricted to seeking information on a selected alternative after a migration decision concerning a particular destination has already been taken. This means that people often gather necessary information not in order to facilitate their decision-making but rather as a form of preparation before departure. The citation below from an interview conducted in Australia illustrates this phenomenon:

It will now come out that it was accidental and that we are so, I do not know, crazy, because we hardly checked anything. We based [our decision] mainly on our own stereotypes and convictions and an absolute certainty that the sun shines in Australia, definitely more than in Canada. We looked on the Internet, checked the question of work permit, so certainly we sought information after we had decided (...) This was already after we made the decision, not before. (F, 30, Australia, 2014).

In light of this, one may wonder whether doing research with regard to the chosen alternative may lead prospective migrants to withdraw their previously taken decision upon discovering a discouraging fact about the selected destination. While it is possible for this to occur, none of the informants mentioned such a situation when talking about alternative destinations they had considered, and we do not have information on any people who may have researched their selected destination and then decided to remain in Poland.

Those who had not done any research before deciding which country to migrate to were not the most extreme cases in terms of the lack of evidence-based decision-making. Some informants admitted that they had not prepared themselves in any

way before departure. An example was a female informant in Ireland, classified as a multiple-criteria decision maker, who admitted that she did not possess any information about her future destination, neither at the decision stage nor at the point of departure:

The word Ireland for me... when people say Canada, US, France, Italy, you usually have a picture in your head, you associate it with something. (...) Ireland to me was a great unknown. I did not associate it with anything, completely. (...) I did not have any ideas. Not knowing the country, not knowing the people, I did not try to imagine anything myself, I thought simply that a country is like any country, only that we would speak English and what it would look like, we would find out on the spot. (F, 46, Ireland, 2007).

This points to a process of knowledge building based not on research but on hands-on experience. Such a spontaneous approach may be the result of the limited risks involved in the migration of Poles nowadays, especially within the EU. If return is possible and not very costly, they reason, then why not go and check.

Surprisingly, people migrating to Australia do not seem to differ from the intra-EU migrants in terms of intensity of pre-departure preparations (a bit better informed were perhaps only those who used the services of a migration or an educational agent). Naturally, differences in this regard may be explained by characterological issues, which is not a subject of this study, but also by an opportunity structure which determines a decision space (including e.g. whether a decision took place in pre-Internet times or in the era of the Internet, see also e.g. Thulin and Vilhelmson (2014), and current migration regimes) as well as the decision maker's age or phase of life. An important dividing line runs between those migrating alone and those migrating with school or pre-school-age children, providing evidence for the importance of life cycle in migration decision-making (Kennan & Walker 2013). Numerous interviewees justified their not-fully-information-based decisions of the past by their young age and lack of experience. Importantly, some of the interviewees who admitted to a lack of rationality and preparedness in the past declared that they had matured and/or learned thanks to their experiences since then. For instance, one interviewee, whose first attempt at migration had involved some bad experiences, declared that she had changed her approach and had taken a much more evidence-based and conscious decision the second time:

And the criterion that was basic for me was that when I go for the second time, I would go to work that is secure, that is in line with my qualifications and I would certainly not go without preparation. (F, 35, UK, 2013).

One of the interlocutors in Germany described his internal migration trajectories in Germany, admitting that he 'had taken a rather difficult path' in choosing his place of residence. First, he had consulted a ranking of German universities to choose

a small town where the best university in his field of study was located. After that, he had moved to a bigger town. Finally, after two years he had decided to relocate to Berlin. This is how he commented on his experience:

Well, if I had prepared myself more, devoted more time or attention to it, it would have been more, I don't know, optimised, but on the other hand, I do not find it wrong. It cost more time and energy to move from one to another, but also experience. (M, 37, Germany, 2002).

This example shows that an apparent failure in a migratory career (Martiniello & Rea 2014) might in fact be perceived as an asset when viewed in terms of a learning process (or rationalisation). This again exemplifies a clash between subjective and objective rationality.

An additional important factor are intentions to stay in the selected country for a longer time, to return or to migrate further. For those who had not intended to stay, the costs of in-depth research may have seemed too high in light of potential chances and risks. Those who prepared themselves for a longer migration experience might have had greater motivation to invest time and effort into searching for information about their future place of residence. Nevertheless, few people in the sample went abroad with a clear intention to remain there for an extended period (an exception were some one-step decision makers who decided to move to their foreign partners' home countries), which points to the 'intentional unpredictability' of their migrations (Eade et al. 2007).

7. Multiple migrants

In light of the above considerations on migration intentions and learning, it is worth distinguishing a category of migrants that may be labelled as multiple migrants. This term usually refers to those who 'engage in international movements repeatedly and direct this movement at different destination countries' (Salamońska 2017: 3). Contrary to this broad definition, however, for the sake of this study, a key factor identifying this category of migrants is not the mere fact of possessing migration experience in a country other than the one they were staying in at the time of the study. In other words, it is not enough that a person has had several episodes of living abroad in different countries. It is rather a whole philosophy of treating international mobility as an inherent part of one's life and perceiving it as a way of making life more attractive and fulfilling. This brings the notion of a multiple migrant, as understood in this paper, close to the DaVanzo's (1981) notion of a 'chronic' migrant or Engbersen et al.'s (2013) notion of a 'footloose' migrant. The multiple migrants of this definition experience a specific 'hunger for migration', in which former and/or current

migration experiences creates a desire to experience more. One of the Dutch interviewees even used this ‘hunger metaphor’ to describe her desire for gaining further migration experience:

I have such an impression, when you have tried once, in particular that I left and I managed it nicely, but I still have some kind of hunger and the Netherlands is not a place where I’m going to stay for my whole life, I already know it and I would like to seek new places. (F, 28, Netherlands, 2015).

This way of thinking allows the placement of multiple migrants into the framework of lifestyle-migration, in which migration is treated as a way of seeking a better quality of life, with a potential for self-realisation embedded in the very act of spatial mobility (Benson & O’Reilly 2009; O’Reilly & Benson 2009). This model of migration, with its characteristics such as temporality of stay, legal residential status, no predestined receiving country and intentional unpredictability, also fits well into the liquid migration framework (Engbersen 2012; Engbersen & Snel 2013).

Although at each single decision point, they belong to one of the types of destination choice decision makers distinguished in Section 5 (as they rarely decide on a sequence of moves, usually focusing on one at a time), the repetitive nature of their migration destination choice makes them qualitatively different. On the one hand, given their previous migration experience and obstacles they might have encountered in their past destinations, they may be increasingly conscious decision makers with each successive move as they have acquired migration-specific human capital. Nevertheless, a truly rational approach as the one described in the quote below was by no means uniform among multiple migrants despite their cumulative experience:

We came to the conclusion that we would look for another country. We first thought London, then Brussels or Amsterdam. Why? We did not want to learn another language, we spoke French and English. We looked where there is on average the highest level of life satisfaction, what the earnings are, how it is with an airport, i.e. how many direct flights to various countries in the world there are. (...) We made tables: what kind of apartments you can have, for what price, how fast you can get a job, if you lose a job, how fast you can find a new one, what are the social benefits, e.g. if I lose my job. The Netherlands won. (F, 37, Netherlands, 2008).

This interviewee was in fact the only individual in the entire sample who applied such an ‘analytical’ approach to her destination choice. Her migration background and skills – born in a mixed marriage, married to a foreigner, having lived in three different countries beyond Poland in the past and speaking seven foreign languages fluently – make her an exceptional type.

On the other hand, satisficing among multiple migrants does not seem so irrational, as – much as is the case with vacation decision-making (Decrop & Snelders 2005) –

none of their choices seem final, since they intend to undertake further international movements. This allows the placement of single migration decisions within longer ‘sequence of location choices’, which implies the opportunity to modify a decision evaluated as not sufficiently successful (Kennan & Walker 2013), or the opportunity to make a ‘corrective’ move (DaVanzo 1981). As Ciobanu (2015) writes, multiple migration involves the exploration of various destinations and as such it ‘underlines the trial-and-error character of migration’.

8. Summary and conclusions

The purpose of this research was to explore how people make decisions pertaining to migration destination choice, focusing on ways in which they go about the simplification of complexity of a choice situation. By exploring the nature of bounded rationality in migration decision-making, the study helps to fill a gap in the literature on migration destination choice, which says relatively little about the process of arriving at an outcome, in particular its structural aspects. The study reveals the variety of manifestations of rationality boundedness in migration destination choice, concentrating on structural aspects of the decision-making process and informing the discussion on migration and risk.

The article proposes a simple typology of migration destination choice decision makers with respect to the ways in which they have chosen their destination. It uses the cases of Polish migrants in four EU countries and Australia. The proposed typology includes three main types of decision makers: *one-step decision makers*, *single-criterion two-step decision makers* and *multiple-criteria two-step decision makers*. The first type encompasses people whose decision to move to a particular country was not preceded by a separate decision to leave Poland and was either based on their former connections to the destination country in question (*primed one-step decision makers*) or was mostly accidental (*unprimed one-step decision makers*). Representatives of the second and the third types took a separate decision to leave first and based their choice among the available alternatives on one or on more criteria, respectively. The typology was purposely devoid of context (as it does not focus on particular reasons, but rather on the *structure* of the process of destination choice), which makes it more universal and potentially applicable to different geographical contexts. A promising venue of inquiry for future studies would be to identify, using quantitative methods applied to the qualitative material yet based on a larger, representative sample, determinants underlying the different types individuals belong to.

The analysis shows that the boundedness of rationality among migration destination choice decision makers may manifest itself in different ways – depending on the type of decision maker. It takes the form of acceptance of an accidentally appearing opportunity without considering alternative destinations with unprimed

one-step decision makers, of making a decision based on a single, good reason where single-criterion two-step decision makers are concerned, or of adherence to the recognition heuristic as with some two-step decision makers. It also manifests as implicit criteria used by decision makers, leading to a limited set of possible destinations under consideration (as suggested by Roseman 1983 and Tabor et al. 2015); these are often an effect of cultural constraints. The findings, however, do not lend support to Roseman's assumption that people perform destination selection in an implicit fashion, even when they are not considering migration. What the findings suggest is that it is indeed possible that people run a stock of potential migration destinations in their heads, but these are not necessarily *their* potential migration destinations, but rather popular migration destinations among Poles in general. At the same time, the presence of priming by destination choice points to the role of cumulative knowledge-building, which is in line with Roseman's postulate of not reducing the decision process to a point in time or a short time interval and which means that the apparent simplification of people's destination choice decisions may in fact be illusive.

I argue that multiple migrants, defined as those who have migration experience in more than one country and treat international mobility as an inherent part of their lives, form a special category of decision makers, distributed across the three types, yet different in qualitative terms. On the one hand, previous experience potentially makes them more conscious decision makers. On the other hand, they may be less inclined to seek an optimal destination at a given decision point, as none of their choices are expected to be final (at least up to a certain point in time). This makes their process of destination choice similar to destination selection by tourists, which points to the potential utility of theoretical approaches developed in tourism studies for migration studies.

The study shows that a decision about where to migrate is often spontaneous, or at least not fully information-based. Even with multiple-criteria two-step decision makers, research is often limited to the selected alternative, which points to an experience-based instead of a research-based process of knowledge building. The study shows that despite the wide data availability of today, destination choice does not necessarily involve extensive information search and complex thought processes. Although the analysed sample was not intended to be representative for the population of Polish migrants in the five countries covered by the study, the fact that only one respondent might be labelled as a truly 'analytical' decision maker seems telling and is in line with previous results (see e.g. Baláž et al. 2014). Relatively (or subjectively) low risks involved in the departure as well as the possibility of return make people more inclined to try migration, not bothering to invest too much effort in preparations. As the example of Australia suggests, the spontaneous character of destination selection process is not simply a derivative of freedom of movement and geographical closeness.

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