

## EXPLORING STEREOTYPES AMONG FORMER YUGOSLAV COUNTRIES: METHODOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

### Our approach

The methodological approach of our study addressing national stereotypes among former Yugoslav countries and their impact on international business has been strongly influenced by the seminal work of Katz and Braly (1933) and the so-called Princeton trilogy (Katz and Braly, 1933; Gilbert, 1951; Karlins et al., 1969) which looked at “[w]hat do people believe about different social groups, and do these beliefs change from one generation to the next?” (Madon et al., 2001: 996). In keeping with the social psychology tradition of ethnic and stereotype research, as well as the international business field’s more recent evolution towards the much needed interdisciplinarity (Buckley and Lessard, 2005; Cheng et al., 2009; Rašković, 2014; Korez Vide and Jurše, 2016), we have been influenced by Hopkins and Moore’s (2001) work on identity, distance and stereotyping. In particular, we have sought to link the research on national stereotypes with Bogardus’ (1933) research on social (ethnic) distance in the context of their impact on various aspects of international business relationships (Jaklič and Svetličič, 2016) within the specific context of former territory of Yugoslavia 25 years after its turbulent disintegration. Like Katz and Braly’s (1933) seminal work, the attitudinally-focused work of Emory Bogardus on social distance continues to have a profound impact on sociology and social psychology, making it “one of the oldest psychological attitude scales” in the social sciences still in wide use across the social sciences today (Wark and Galliher, 2007: 391).

We have connected these streams of research not only due to the strong substantive link between identity, distance and stereotyping (Hopkins and Moore, 2001), but also due to the rising interest in transcending the culturally-centric research and looking at the impact of various kinds of *distance* in international business (Avloniti and Filippaios, 2014; Harzing and Pudelko, 2015; Håkanson et al., 2015), as well as the growing call for more research on the role of (managerial) attitudes in international business behaviour (Drogendijk and Slangen, 2006; Aharoni et al., 2011).

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## Data collection

The data collection took place at leading universities in each of the former Yugoslav countries in the 2014/2015 academic year among mostly undergraduate university students. Table 1 summarises the key characteristics of each of the seven country samples.

Table 1: KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR MATCHED COUNTRY SAMPLES  
(SELECTIVE PRESENTATION)

	Bosnia	Croatia	Kosovo	Macedonia	Montenegro	Serbia	Slovenia
Sample (% in brackets)	89 (10.9%)	116 (14.3%)	68 (8.4%)	138 (17%)	92 (11.3%)	108 (13.3%)	203 (24.9%)
Share of women	53.8%	70.1%	39.2%	53.8%	70.2%	76.4%	67.4%
Age (median year of birth)	1990	1991	1984	1994	1992	1992	1992
Religious background							
– Catholic	6.1%	84.3%	6.1%	0	7.7%	0	66.3%
– Orthodox	8.5%	0.9%	3%	27.8%	71.4%	93.4%	1.5%
– Muslim	70.7%	0	83.3%	69.9%	17.6%	0	0.5%
Area of studies							
– Economics	0	82.6%	20.7%	14%	100%	47.2%	67%
– Business	1.2%	16.5%	15.5%	8.3%	0	52.8%	25.9%
– Political/international studies	92.9%	0	39.7%	41.3%	0	0	1.5%
Place of residency							
– Capital	69.8%	64.3%	60.3%	5.3%	56.2%	76.9%	1%
– Urban	19.8%	20.9%	23.8%	55%	28.1%	13.9%	39.9%
– Suburb	7%	0.9%	1.6%	1.5%	9%	4.6%	21.2%
– Rural	3.5%	13.9%	14.3%	38.2%	6.7%	4.6%	37.9%
Work experience							
– No work experience	53.6%	20.2%	17.5%	56.6%	61.1%	81.5%	10%
– Student work experience	25%	75.4%	19%	27.1%	25.6%	15.7%	80.5%
– Regular work	21.4%	4.4%	63.5%	16.3%	13.3%	2.8%	9.5%

Note: Summing up the answers may not add to 100% since only selected answer options are presented in the table for illustrative purposes (i.e. religion).

Generally, such matched sampling approaches are common in cross-country and cross-cultural comparisons (Peterson and Merunka, 2014), particularly from a social psychology perspective (Terracciano et al., 2005). The

use of university students in social psychology is also quite common (Bello et al., 2009), as seen in international behavior studies (Hampton, 1979) and consumer behavior studies (Rašković et al., 2016). It also follows the seminal approaches to stereotype research by Katz and Braly (1933) as well as the more recent one by Madon et al. (2001).

However, when looking at the country sample characteristics in Table 1 the Kosovo sample shows the lowest relative degree of matching the other country samples, which should be taken into account while interpreting our results, as well as the large share of ethnic (Muslim) Albanians within the Macedonian sample.

## Methodology

In terms of the national stereotypes, we employed a two-step research approach similar to that used in Katz and Braly's (1933) original study. In the first step, respondents were simply asked to recall five top-of-mind characteristics (attributes) for each of the other six former Yugoslav nations, as well as for their own nation (auto-stereotypes) to the cue "*What are they [the given nation] like*". In the second step, a list of 13 specific attributes taken from Katz and Braly's (1933) original list of 84 personality traits, complemented with a few business-specific attributes, was presented to the respondents where they had to evaluate each of the other six former Yugoslav nations and their own nation (auto-stereotypes) on a 4-point ordinal scale corresponding to: 1-completely disagree, 2-somewhat disagree, 3-somewhat agree, 4-completely agree. We deliberately excluded a neutral answer option to allow us to later test the answer valence and to avoid socially desirable answers and/or 'political correctness'.

The social (ethnic distance) scale was operationalised as a 6-point ordinal, Likert-type scale based on Bogardus' (1933) ethnic distance scale, corresponding to willingness to: 1-live in the same country (highest possible social distance), 2-live in the same city, 3-have as a co-worker/business partner, 4-have as a neighbour, 5-have as a friend, and 6-have as a family member/spouse (lowest possible social distance). Obviously, here the respondents were asked to evaluate only the other six former Yugoslav nations and *not* their own nation.

On the dependent 'variable' side, we focused on different aspects of international business relationships, following the so-called relationship-based paradigm in management (Hedaa and Ritter, 2005) and the resource-based perspective of competitive advantage in international business (Hunt and Morgan, 1996). In this regard, respondents were asked to evaluate their willingness to engage in the following aspects of international business interaction: (1) willingness to do business, (2) severity/toughness in

negotiating, (3) solution finding/problem solving, and (4) leniency/tendency to compromise.

Of course, our questionnaire also included appropriate control variables, such as frequency of interaction with all others from Yugoslav nations and a series of demographic questions, which are highlighted in Table 1.

### Limitations of our research

While great effort was made to have native speakers translate the questionnaires, use of a more elaborate translation/back-translation approach would have been even better. Further, our study is cross-sectional in nature and thus prone to all the drawbacks of cross-sectional research. In particular, measuring national stereotypes at a specific point in time might have been biased by the nature of bilateral political relations and corresponding media reporting at that specific moment in time.

In line with the comparative nature of our research and the use of matched samples, our results hold less value in absolute terms and for each country separately, but should be examined in relative terms vis- -vis other countries. Moreover, while considerable effort was made to ensure the highest possible level of sample matching, we have already pointed out that this level of matching varies between the country samples and is lowest in the case of the Kosovo sample. All of these issues should be taken into account while interpreting the results of our study.

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