

Self-Initiated Expatriates in Context

Recognizing Space, Time,
and Institutions

Edited by **Maike Andresen,**
Chris Brewster and Vesa Suutari

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A Research Agenda

Maike Andresen and Birgit Muskat

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Introduction

Culture shapes the way we think, feel, and interact, and subsequently influences our values, attitudes, and behaviours in the workplace (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). For expatriates, any relocation abroad means a change in culture—and being exposed to cultural distance (CD). Consequently, expatriates need to know, understand, and manage CD and the differences in values between people of different national cultures (Ambos & Håkanson, 2014; Beugelsdijk, Maseland, Onrust, van Hoorn, & Slangen, 2015). This adaptation from home to host country requires cognitive and affective abilities to cope and strive in the new general living and work environment (Selmer & Luring, 2013; Wechtler, Koveshnikov, & Dejoux, 2017).

However, whereas CD has implications for all expatriates when preparing and moving overseas, we argue that CD for self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) requires a deeper understanding, because the underlying motivation and willingness to relocate varies within this group, ranging from work-related to private reasons (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010). The willingness to relocate internationally is traditionally understood to depend on the degree of difference between cultures (Lowe, Downes, & Kroeck, 1999). It is also known that CD is higher in unfamiliar cultures, involving higher uncertainty (Kogut & Singh, 1988). In turn, high uncertainty and complexity has traditionally been regarded as a barrier to international relocation (Wagner & Westaby, 2009).

SIEs are unique, as they go abroad without any support from a sending institution (Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011; Hussain & Deery, 2018). Moreover, SIEs are required to proactively seek new job opportunities before moving to, or during the process of settling into, a foreign country (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014). While assigned expatriates (AEs) sometimes receive support, such as cultural training prior to and during their relocation, from their sending employers, SIEs typically lack this organisational assistance (Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, & Dickmann, 2014). Therefore, SIEs need not only to get familiar with a new national culture and manage their careers, but also to accommodate themselves to the new

host organisational culture and local career norms (underlying a career culture), such as rules for promotions (Andresen, 2018).

Consequently, it might be assumed that SIEs have to overcome more and higher obstacles than AEs (Andresen, 2018). So far little is known about how SIEs perceive and evaluate the CDs between national, organisational, and career cultures, which factors influence expatriates' perceptions and evaluations of these CDs, and how these relate to their willingness to relocate. This chapter focuses on understanding CD with respect to nations, organisations, and careers on an individual level and aims to contribute with nuanced conceptualisation of CD for SIEs.

With this background, and the argument that SIEs' underlying motivation and willingness to relocate varies from those of other expatriates, the aim of this chapter is to review the extant literature on CD and SIEs' willingness to relocate. We link these two strands of literature and develop a research agenda, highlighting ways to better integrate SIEs' characteristics in future CD research. Specifically, our chapter addresses the following research questions: (1) How does existing research conceptualise and measure CD and what are the key limitations? (2) How could CD be conceptualised in order to better capture the SIE context and SIEs' perceptions and evaluations of CD? (3) How does CD relate to SIEs' willingness to relocate internationally?

Exploring these questions is relevant from a labour market perspective because, in a globalised world, individuals' international mobility has become a necessary precondition to reach the next career level or obtain specific leadership positions in many companies (De Cieri & Dowling, 2012; Haines, Saba, & Choquette, 2008). Moreover, international mobility opens up new opportunities for individuals, for example, to escape from a high risk of unemployment or a lack of demand for certain occupations in their home country (Richardson & McKenna, 2002). CD is likely to be among the key factors that influence individuals' motivation to relocate. Thus, we argue that CD needs to be understood at the individual level. Knowledge about factors that influence SIEs' perceived CD and attitude towards CD could help organisations to alter individuals' perceptions and attitudes. Thus, the chapter aims to outline a research agenda about CD amongst SIEs.

We start by reviewing the literature on the notion of CD and then synthesise the extant critique to existing CD research. We derive implications for how CD could be conceptualised and measured to better include the specific characteristics of SIEs. Based on this we emphasise implications for research and important avenues forward for an underrepresented area in SIE careers research.

Cultural Distance: A Definition

CD describes the (dis)similarity of values between people of different national cultures (Ambos & Håkanson, 2014; Beugelsdijk et al., 2015).

CD has its origins in international business (IB) research and studies often refer to Beckerman's (1956) concept of 'psychic distance', and the seminal work of Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions as well as its reflection in Kogut and Singh's (1988) index, which is used to measure CD. National culture consists in "patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting" (Kluckhohn, 1954, p. 86) as reflected in the population's values and attitudes. The resulting behaviour then shapes organisational management practices (House et al., 2004; Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2003).

IB researchers usually focus on firm-level comparisons to investigate how internationalisation is influenced by national CD, for example, when firms enter international markets or explore how different national values shape operations of host and foreign firms (Ambos & Håkanson, 2014). Understanding CD is necessary for internationally operating firms, managers, and expatriates, as it informs both individual decision-making and firm-level strategic decisions, including entry to foreign countries, organisational design, and relationships with customers and stakeholders.

Drawing on literature from other domains, the CD concept has been used to describe how international experience changes behaviour over time. Tay, Westman, and Chia (2008) examine business travellers' behaviour and find that experience is an important antecedent to manage national CD on the individual level. Greater depth and intensity of exposure to multicultural experiences, and increased frequency and length of their trips, lead to better understanding of cultural norms, thus higher adaptability. Yet, it is obvious that CD is a highly individualised concept as for some individuals too much distance between national cultures leads to emotional discomfort, whilst for others a "high level of CD appears to enhance the allure of some locations as 'dream' travel destinations" (Yang, Liu, & Li, 2019, p. 224).

While all SIEs are heavily influenced by the CD to their respective host country, we argue that there might be differences within the cohort of SIEs in terms of how CD is perceived. Perceptions might vary and could be negative or positive, and differences might be rooted in the distinct underlying motivations that persuade SIEs to go abroad. Further, we posit that these motivations influence the way SIEs deal with CD and perceptions of obstacles might vary. In order to distinguish motivations of SIEs, we use Richardson and McKenna's (2002) typology of SIEs, distinguishing four groups: 'Architects', 'mercenaries', 'explorers', and so-called refugees. Each of the four groups has different motivation to leave their home country. For 'architects' (motivated by career development), 'mercenaries' (motivated by financial improvements), and 'explorers' (motivated by adventure), pull-factors of the destination country prevail. In stark contrast, 'refugees' are being pushed by unfavourable conditions in their home countries, such as low career prospects and, thus, decided to move. Subsequently, whereas for the first three groups, the pull-factors of career prospects, financial benefits, or making new interesting experiences might even evoke positive attitudes towards CD, the fourth group,

‘refugees’, are likely to see CD as problematic and more difficult to deal with.

Table 4.1 summarises the key motivation and essential characteristics of four groups of SIEs, confirming that all four have the motivation to be internationally mobile and relocate abroad—yet have important differentiators that impact upon their willingness to relocate to another national culture, employing organisation, and career environment. One key differentiator is whether the trigger to leave their home country is either the pull of the destination country (e.g. pulled from career prospects, financial benefits or experiences) or a push from their home country.

However, to date the conceptualisation of CD is limited to national culture and a number of antecedents and consequences of CD remain

Table 4.1 Why do SIEs relocate internationally?

<i>SIE Type</i>	<i>Key Motivation</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
‘Architects’	Career building motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire to enhance their career prospects the rationale for being mobile • Intention to do ‘the right thing’ in order to be promoted • Assumption that expatriation is beneficial for career progress • Carefully plan and prepare their expatriation
‘Mercenaries’	Financial motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial success orientation is most important • Pursue the opportunity to make and save large amounts of money, e.g. to support their family in their home country • Earn more money than in home country, despite potential negative aspects that cross-cultural adjustment and living abroad might bring
‘Explorers’	Experience-seeking motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-work-related motives are predominant • Adventure-oriented and attracted by new experiences • Cultural uniqueness of new host country is central aspect • Search for new experiences in both life and work
‘Refugees’	Unfavourable conditions in home country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Refugee’ SIEs are or perceive they are required to leave their home country • Escape from negative environments • Most challenged by adjusting to work job in new country and culture, require longest time to gain proficiency

Source: Own summary, based on Richardson and McKenna (2002); Selmer and Lauring (2013).

unclear, especially at the individual level. We address these challenges in conceptualising CD in the literature in the following with a view to presenting a refined approach as relevant in the SIE context.

Challenges in Conceptualising and Measuring Cultural Distance

To address research question 1, the chapter now turns to discuss and synthesise the approaches taken in the IB literature to define CD. For this purpose, the challenges in conceptualising and measuring CD are grouped into four major points of critique.

- i) The challenge of the positivist paradigm:* The prevailing paradigm in CD research has been positivist, so that most studies assume that CD can be captured as an ‘objective’ measure (e.g. Gelfand et al., 2011; House et al., 2004; Kogut & Singh, 1988). Thus, a set of measures has been used by scholars. The most widely used and accepted CD-scale has been developed by Kogut and Singh (1988): a mean-based index of CD indicating the deviation between two countries in the national-level values of Hofstede’s (1980) cultural dimensions. A positivist paradigm implies that there is an exact, objective measure to determine CD and compute nation-to-nation differences in figures. Yet, a growing number of scholars criticise various aspects of measurement of CD (e.g. Ambos & Håkanson, 2014; Beugelsdijk et al., 2015; Harzing & Pudelko, 2016) and some researchers question the traditional positivist paradigm, pointing out the difficulty of ‘measuring’ distance of cultural values (Ambos & Håkanson, 2014). Ambos and Håkanson (2014) specifically argue that context needs to be captured when measuring and evaluating CD.
- ii) The reductionist view of seeing CD only as a negative construct:* A major conceptual challenge of CD is the strong emphasis on negative aspects of CD (Harzing & Pudelko, 2016; Verbeke, van Tulder, & Puck, 2017). The vast majority of the extant literature regards CD as an obstacle to mobility or a barrier to cultural adjustment (Verbeke et al., 2017). Studies argue that high CD typically equates with high complexity in strategic and operational business; studies conclude that low distance facilitates processes and fosters connectedness (Verbeke et al., 2017). Overall, Harzing and Pudelko (2016) criticise the scope of current measurement, operationalisation, and the overarching research paradigm of CD, arguing that it is somewhat narrow; they even challenge the ‘explanatory power’ of existing CD studies. To add to these reduced perspectives of CD, Stahl, Miska, Lee, and De Luque (2017) stress the importance of adding positive aspects of CD to obtain a more balanced treatment of culture in cross-cultural management.

- iii) The assumption that CD is symmetric:* Another major critique, relating to both measurement and conceptualisation of CD, arises from the overall assumption that CD is symmetric. Studies have shown that direction of cultural flow matters and hence there is every reason to assume different magnitudes in cultural differences (Selmer, Chiu, & Shenkar, 2007). Thus, the asymmetry effect needs to be taken into account when measuring CD (Verbeke et al., 2017). Using the Kogut and Singh index, the extant literature has rendered the direction of the flow irrelevant, e.g. a U.S. expatriate in Germany is presumed to face the same CD as a German expatriate in the USA. However, basic business assumptions may vary between the two cultures and there could be differences in the role of the manager. Therefore, the impact of CD is contingent on the direction of expatriates' international relocation. Here, the additional complexity of CD arises for studies that investigate multiple country settings. While dyadic differences between pairs of countries are less complex to measure, assessing cultural differences between more than two societal cultures interacting with each other might have different outcomes (Ambos & Håkanson, 2014).
- iv) The issue with overgeneralisation and finding the appropriate unit of analysis:* Moreover, critique relates to the overgeneralisation of culture, because within-country variations are often ignored: "Extant practice in international management is to measure cultural distance as a nation-to-nation comparison of country means on cultural values, thereby ignoring the cultural variation that exists within countries" (Beugelsdijk et al., 2015, p. 165). Finally, a related challenge in research designs is to find the appropriate unit of analysis. Sousa and Bradley (2005) pose the question, what constitutes the appropriate unit of analysis to measure CD, and whether it is at national, firm, or individual level.

Adapting the Conceptualisation and Evaluation of Cultural Distance in the SIE Context: New Avenues for Future Research

Departing from this critique and to answer research question 2, we proceed to discuss new avenues to conceptualise and evaluate CD to better capture the characteristics of SIEs. Specifically, we address the critique that CD can be considered as a subjective and perceptual construct, emphasise both positive and negative implications of CD at the individual level, and show that the way perceptions shape SIEs' attitudes is country-context dependent. Further, we proceed to argue that not only national culture matters in the SIE context, but also CD in terms of organisational culture as well as career norms.

Research Implication 1: Conceptualisation of CD as a ‘Subjective’ Distance Is Based on SIEs’ Perception of Cultural Values

Most prevailing studies use a positivist paradigm to objectively measure CD (see challenge i). And, in order to have an exact estimation of nation-to-nation differences in cultural values, existing measures of CD often rely on supposedly objective national-level values (e.g. Kogut & Singh, 1988). Yet, we also identified limitations in this approach and highlighted that an evaluation of CD can also include subjective, socially constructed views. For example, national-level cultural values are based on the average of individuals’ self-reported values or other attributes in a country (Smith, 2006). Further, cultural values (such as defined by GLOBE, Hofstede, Trompenaars) are meaningful at the societal level only. While cultural values at the societal level reflect the individuals’ average cultural values, each of the value dimensions underlying societal culture models has large variation across individuals in societies (see Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007).

It can be argued that an SIE’s perception is an individual’s constructed personal view of the world that emerges from “salient social and cultural elements” (Demes & Geeraert, 2014, p. 103). Thus, even when exposed to the same cultural experience, two SIEs may perceive it in two different ways and construct their own unique meanings. Hence, objective (national level) and perceived, constructed values (individual level) might differ. To extend this discussion, it is important to consider the SIEs’ level of experience, level of cultural learning and knowledge. Inter-individual differences in the perception of the same culture result among other things from differences in individuals’ cultural intelligence (CQ).

CQ is defined as “the capacity to function effectively within environments that are characterised by high cultural complexity. In order to function effectively within cross-cultural environments, in particular, certain cognitive, motivational, and behavioural characteristics are necessary” (Andresen & Bergdolt, 2017, p. 185). It can be assumed that the better the cognitive characteristics of the SIE, the more the individual perception of culture will correspond to the perception of those who are members of the culture in question. To conclude, when conducting research about SIEs, data about CD needs to capture individuals’ subjective perception of the cultural values and the CD (Aryee, Chay, & Chew, 1996), to complement positive paradigms.

Research Implication 2: Conceptualisation of CD on the Individual Level Encompasses Positive and Negative Aspects

In the literature review, we showed that most research views CD as an obstacle, making individual and organisational decision-making more complex (see challenge ii). Yet, we argue that whether SIEs view CD

negatively or positively might be influenced by their level of experience, values, and the various motives that lead to their decision to relocate (Milfont, Duckitt, & Wagner, 2010; Richardson & McKenna, 2002). For example, ‘architects’ might evaluate CD rather neutrally—and rather as one element that has to be managed during their overseas career advancement; ‘explorers’ might be stimulated by CD and motivated by their experiences, as adventure-seeking and a new country’s culture is part of their reason to be mobile. Further, it could be assumed that ‘merchants’ might be pragmatic in terms of their CD perception whereas, clearly, ‘refugees’ might see CD negatively and as a major obstacle. So-called ‘refugees’ international relocation demands a high emotional effort to leave their home countries and migrate that is likely to make the relocation comparably more difficult (Selmer & Luring, 2013). Overall, we suggest that it is easier for those SIEs with dominant cognitive rationales (e.g. career or financial reasons) to relocate to a new culture, organisation and career environment.

This implies that in terms of the measurement of CD there is a difference between an SIE’s perception of CD and his or her attitude towards CD. Even in cases of similarly perceived CD at the individual level, people are likely to differ in their attitude towards CD. Attitudes are defined as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). Thus, the attitude towards CD is an explicit appraisal or evaluation of CD as it relates to personal values (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012) that expresses the level of contentment with and positive or negative feelings about the perceived CD between countries, i.e. whether a person is attracted by the foreign culture. The contentment relates to cognition and the positive/negative feeling relates to affect (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). In consequence, two SIEs might perceive a large CD between their country of origin and country of destination, but differ in their evaluation of this difference in that one person feels attracted to the large CD (which could be the case for some ‘explorers’) whereas the other individual is put off (which could be the case for some ‘refugees’). As argued previously, CQ is based on not only cognitive but also motivational and behavioural characteristics. We would expect that the higher an SIE’s CQ, the more effective the individual’s cross-cultural interactions and, thus, the more positive the attitude towards the perceived CD between the home and host country.

Research Implication 3: SIEs’ Perception of and Attitude Towards CD Relate to Specific Countries

While traditional measures of CD in IB implicitly assume symmetry (see challenge iii), in SIE research the direction of the international mobility should be considered. Researchers argue that individuals experience more difficulty in adjusting to the local environment when they relocate

from loose cultures to tight cultures than when they relocate from tight cultures to loose cultures (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006; Selmer et al., 2007). In tight culture nations norms are stronger and deviant behaviours are less tolerated and more strongly sanctioned (Gelfand et al., 2011), making SIEs' cultural learning more complex and adjustment abroad more difficult. While SIEs' perceived CD between two countries can be expected to be rather symmetric, the attitude towards CD, i.e. its evaluation, is likely to be contingent on the direction of SIEs' international mobility (Ambos & Håkanson, 2014). Thus, we expect to find an asymmetry effect that is reflected in SIEs' attitude towards CD (Verbeke et al., 2017).

If the attitude towards CD is asymmetric, then the current approach of many studies in the SIE context (e.g. Aryee et al., 1996; Wan, Hui, & Tiang, 2003) of investigating individuals' general receptivity towards a relocation to a 'culturally similar vs. dissimilar host country', i.e. without reference to specific countries and their national culture (Wagner & Westaby, 2009) and to individuals' attitude to CD, falls short. Moreover, some countries show higher within-country cultural variability (Spain, Belgium, India) than others (Sweden, Norway) so that studying regional cultural differences within specific countries might be important (Kaasa, Vadi, & Varblane, 2014).

Also, the potential influencing effect of CQ with regards to CD as outlined previously (see research implications 1 and 2) is linked to specific cultures or regions. Depending on an SIE's international experience, his or her CQ can be limited to these specific cultural contexts and in the extreme case even only to one specific country or region (Andresen & Bergdolt, 2017). Motives to relocate ('architects', 'mercenaries', 'explorers', and 'refugees') are likely to be linked to specific countries and regions. While 'mercenaries', motivated by financial improvements, are likely to be open towards a greater number of countries, 'architects', motivated by career development, might be more influenced by the host country's destination image and respective career profitability. To conclude, here, future research might consider SIEs' subjective CD relative to specific countries and/or regions to better understand individual's willingness to relocate to a specific context.

Research Implication 4: A More Fine-Grained Definition of SIEs' CD Includes the Culture Related to the Nation, Organisation and Career

Another challenge in existing conceptualisations of CD is the definition of the adequate unit of analysis (see challenge iv). For 'architects', 'mercenaries', 'explorers', and 'refugees' not only the national culture but partly also the organisational culture and career norms are likely to matter and are relevant units of analysis. For example, in order to advance in their careers, 'architects' need to ensure person-organisation

fit and person-career norm fit is given while abroad in order to optimise their advancement. Thus, to reach an adequate complexity of CD in the SIE context, we consider 'culture' a multilevel phenomenon that encompasses not only the nation, but also one's employing organisation abroad, and one's career (cf. Erez & Gati, 2004). Culture shapes the core values and norms of its members. One's attitude towards one's career need not be isomorphic with one's attitude towards the employing organisation abroad, and indeed these often diverge. These three specific attributes of the nation, organisation, and career underlying SIEs' perceived CD and attitude towards CD are likely to differ in their relative importance for SIEs' willingness to relocate internationally.

First, CD on a national-societal level relates to different values and norms, language, and religion between the home and host national culture and the cultural diversity and between-group CD within the destination country (see Belot & Ederveen, 2012; Wang, De Graaff, & Nijkamp, 2016). The attitude towards national CD depends among others on the attractiveness to the SIE of the country and of its conditions (Wang et al., 2016). Differences between national cultures might pose hurdles that are likely to reduce the attractiveness of self-initiated expatriation. Studies show that expatriation flows to a geographical area with low distance between languages and culture are significantly larger (Belot & Ederveen, 2012). Additional factors that influence an employee's acceptance of mobility opportunities are the cultural diversity, i.e. the sizes or shares of cultural groups in the destination country, and the between-group CD within the country. Results suggest that while CD increases regional attractiveness, individuals were particularly reluctant to accept moves to regions with high average CD between the residing cultural groups (see Belot & Ederveen, 2012; Wang et al., 2016).

Second, CD on the organisational level is strongly interwoven with the national culture (Schein, 1992). It is also known that an SIE's attitude towards organisational CD results from distances in typical characteristics, such as innovation, outcome orientation, risk-taking, attention to details, and team focus (Erez & Gati, 2004; Miron, Erez, & Naveh, 2004; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). As SIEs often work for comparably smaller organisations while abroad (Biemann & Andresen, 2010), a likely difference in organisational culture might relate to innovation, with less SMEs than large firms being strongly oriented towards innovation (Kumar, Boesso, Favotto, & Menini, 2012; Laforet, 2008). Moreover, organisational culture contributes to employees' social identity building. Thus, if the international relocation leads to work for an employer that displays cultural difference at the organisational level from a previous employer, SIEs are required to adjust their social identity to the new employing organisation's beliefs and values. This process might create the potential for social conflict (Gardiner & Jackson, 2012; Vaara,

Sarala, Stahl, & Björkman, 2012) and, thus, influence an SIE's attitude towards organisational CD.

Third, career CD also is unique in the expatriation context. Back in 1990, Hall and Richter created the term 'career culture' (see also Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth, & Larson, 1996) to describe differences in the series of career steps within an organisation, i.e. linear, expert, spiral, and transitory. The four career concepts differ in their definition of career success, level of specialist knowledge and skills, and mobility across occupational areas, specialties, disciplines, or even fields. Thus, differences in the career culture might run counter to an individual's key career motives. In addition, in some occupations social network ties might be difficult to establish in culturally distant destinations and individuals might encounter variations in working practices, tax and legal regimes (Law, Yuen, & Lei, 2016; Manev & Stevenson, 2001).

Depending on the expatriation mode (self-initiated vs. assigned expatriation) and the individual's motive to relocate, the different facets of subjective CD (nation, organisation, career) might be of different relative importance for the expatriate's decision to relocate abroad. While SIEs change employers when going abroad and are, thus, confronted with a new employer's organisational culture, AEs relocate within multinational organisations. Depending on the organisations' internationalisation strategy, the corporate cultures of the home and host organisation can have similarities, so that AEs might be confronted comparably less with organisational CD. With regard to the career culture, Hartmann, Feisel, and Schober (2010) found that multinational organisations apply national career structure norms largely unchanged abroad. Thus, AEs are less likely to be confronted with largely different career structures (Andresen, 2018; Newburry, 2001). By contrast, it is likely that the perceived career CD is higher for some SIEs. This is because SIEs typically work for foreign private and less international companies (Suutari & Brewster, 2000) that tend to apply local career rules, so that many SIEs are exposed to a different national career structure abroad. While AEs are more likely to receive cross-cultural trainings and to be carefully prepared for the foreign assignment by their employers, in many cases these organisational resources available to AEs are not available to SIEs. In consequence of these different conditions, SIEs may perceive a higher national CD at the beginning.

Within the group of SIEs and with respect to the motivation to relocate, especially, career CD is likely to be more important for 'architects' who are driven by career-building considerations. For 'mercenaries' who pursue financial motives the organisational CD might be most relevant. While national CD is likely to be most relevant for 'explorers' who long for adventure and travel, 'refugees' are likely to be influenced by all three facets of CD (Richardson & McKenna, 2002). Thus, the four groups of

SIEs are expected to differ regarding the primary facets of CD pushing or pulling them abroad.

Summary

Studies have shown that for some groups of SIEs, such as ‘explorers’ who are essentially motivated by experiences, adventure, and a new country’s culture, CD is a key positive stimulant for their mobility (Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Selmer & Luring, 2013). This leads us to question the dominant assumption in research that a high CD in unfamiliar cultures automatically involves higher uncertainty and complexity (Kogut & Singh, 1988) that again is a barrier to international relocation (Wagner & Westaby, 2009). In this chapter we showed that the appropriateness of existing constructs and conceptualisations of CD as used in the IB field for research in the expatriation field is limited.

In the following we provide answers to the three research questions we posed. Research question 1 asked, ‘How does existing research conceptualise and measure CD and what are the key limitations?’ Reviewing the literature, mainly in the field of IB, we found that whereas existing CD measures are objective, we would need subjective CD estimates to predict SIEs’ intentions and behaviours. The current use of objective measures to determine CD in expatriation research risks limiting the significance of the findings. Moreover, we referred to the strong emphasis on negative aspects of CD in the IB literature as a major conceptual challenge and stressed that in the field of SIE research both positive and negative aspects need to be considered. We also referred to the limitations regarding the assumption of symmetry, the lack of consideration of within-country variations, the limited complexity of existing CD measures in the IB field, and the need to redefine the unit of analysis.

Regarding research question 2, ‘How could CD be conceptualised in order to better capture the SIE context and SIEs’ perceptions and evaluations of CD?’, we drew attention to the fact that in current SIE research the distinction between objective and subjective CD, perceived CD and attitude towards CD is hardly ever made. We outlined that in the SIE context CD can be conceptualised and measured best by considering the following critical points:

- If individual behaviour is in focus, an SIE’s subjective CD based on individual-level data has a higher explanatory contribution than objective CD based on national-level data.
- Determining an expatriate’s subjective CD based on specific countries/regions has a higher explanatory contribution than a general reference to a ‘culturally similar (or dissimilar) country’.
- Subjective CD consists of perceived CD and attitude towards CD. Cultural values at the national level as underlying objective CD reflect

in SIEs' perceived CD. Perceived CD between countries/regions is an antecedent to an SIE's attitude towards this CD. An SIE's motive to expatriate and CQ is likely to influence perceptions of and attitudes towards CD.

- Subjective CD consists of different facets relating to the nation, organisation and career.

Finally, responding to research question 3, 'How does CD relate to SIEs' willingness to relocate internationally?', we conclude that subjective CD relates to an SIE's willingness to relocate internationally. Specifically, we suggest that:

- The attitude towards CD between the home and host country mediates the positive relationship between perceived CD and the SIE's willingness to relocate to the destination country.
- Depending on the SIE's motive to relocate abroad ('architect', 'mercenary', 'explorer', 'refugee') the different facets of subjective CD (nation, organisation, career) are likely to be of different relative importance in the decision to relocate abroad.
- International (work) experience is likely to lead to an adjustment of the SIE's perceived CD and attitude towards CD.

Future research needs to provide a more detailed analysis and explanation of the relationships between objective and subjective CD as well as its impact on SIEs' willingness and intention to relocate internationally and their factual relocation behaviour. To understand the relationships to a better degree, individual differences such as for example, the expatriation motive, CQ, and prior international (work) experience will need to be considered. Finally, a scale to measure an individual's attitude towards CD needs to be developed and validated. In conclusion, we suggest carefully differentiating an SIE's perception of the CD from the attitude towards CD regarding the nation, organisation, and career and apply these concepts to specific countries and/or regions.

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