



Why Diaspora Matters

1. There has been a massive growth around the world in the interest in Diaspora engagement over the recent years. The Migration Policy Institute in Washington estimate that there are 450 Diaspora initiatives involving 56 countries that have been initiated and over one third have been started in the last 5 years. Today the world is more globalised, interconnected and interdependent than ever before. The recent global economic crisis showed us that it is no longer possible for any nation state to be considered an 'island', nor is it possible to be immune to the ebbs and flows of international commerce. In order to be in a position to fully leverage the advantages of interdependence, companies, countries, and organisations are looking at creating, developing and leveraging complex networks of people to generate social, cultural and economic benefits. Diasporas constitute obvious collectives of people through which networks can be created and mobilised for mutual benefit. Social sites, such as LinkedIn, are allowing new 'networks of mutual interest' be developed globally. We live in a world where the free movement of goods and capital is commonplace. Now we have huge shifts of knowledge, talents and skills across borders. Traditionally Diasporas were looked to for remittances and philanthropy which is, perhaps, to take a limiting view. Now Diasporas are bridges to knowledge, expertise, networks, resources and markets for their countries of origin.

2. Although attracting increasing attention recently it is a very old word with a deep historical provenance. It's origins are Greek and Diaspora is a combination of two words, 'dis' meaning 'through' or 'over' and speiro meaning 'dispersal' or 'to sow'. It owes much of it's origin to the exile of the Jews beyond Israel mainly in the fifth century BC. It is now commonly used in a generic sense for communities of migrants living or settled permanently in other countries, aware of their origins and identity and maintaining various degrees of contact with the home country. Countries are coming to the realisation that this is a resource to be researched, cultivated, solicited and stewarded. Many see this as a way of addressing tough domestic economic challenges and as a key piece of economic recovery. They also see it as more than just financial remittances but also social remittances in the form of ideas, values, beliefs and practices.

3. Technology and communications are changing everything. People can now be 'here' and 'there', lead 'hyphenated lives' (they can be American and Polish, Australian and Greek or Canadian and Basque) and absence no longer equals exile. In the old days when you emigrated you were gone and gone forever. Your geography dictated your identity but now we say 'geography is history.'

4. What were once 'lost actors' can now become 'national assets'. What was once a one way flow of people can now become a two flow of people, knowledge and finance. Countries that historically lost the most to migration are now in a position to benefit the most. Brain drain can become brain gain and brain exchange. The globalisation of trade is driving this phenomenon with the worldwide war for talent, the shift of economic growth to emerging economies and a realisation that Diaspora networks are important sources of trade, investment, tourism, education, culture and sport. Active efforts are now being made

to identify and connect with these highly skilled individuals and link them to national economic development projects.

5. In a sense population shifts are the phenomenon of our time with migration being a 'hot topic' and a politically sensitive issue. There are now more than 240 million people living outside the country they were born in, a number that has tripled in 45 years. There are 80 million Europeans who live outside the country they were born in and 47 million foreign born people living in the EU –16 million from another EU state and 47 million born outside the EU. If migration continues to grow at the same pace in the next twenty years as it did in the last twenty, some analysts predict there could be 450 million international migrants by 2050. Throughout history Diasporas have played powerful roles and this is only going to increase as technology and communications allow Diasporas to play a role without returning to their home countries. Migrants have driven innovation through history and pioneers in creating successful companies. Over 200 of the Fortune 500 companies in the US were started by migrants or the children of migrants. Huge numbers of foreigners went to the US for elite education in the 80s and 90s and remained. For example two thirds of foreign Indians in the US have University degrees – more than three times the number for the US as a whole. These migrants have close family and business connections to their countries of origin. In the US migrants earn 50% of all PhDs in Science and Engineering, invent patents at double the rate of non migrants and have started 25% of all engineering and technology companies. Half of US Nobel Laureates were foreign born. The glue in all these developments is that these people have developed networks in the US. These 'best and brightest' then extended these networks to their home countries and transplanted institutions, relationships, attitudes and, often, capital and businesses that are changing the face of global commerce.

6. An interesting paradox of globalisation is that while the world is being internationalised, at the same time it is being localised. The world shrinks as the local community takes on greater and greater importance. Diasporas play an important role in this as they are essentially about place rather than country and that place could be a region, county, city, region or organisation such as a company, school or college, or sports team. Increasingly we are seeing international networks being built around these allegiances and so we need to take a more inclusive definition of Diaspora on board to accommodate these developments.

7. Governments are increasingly seeing that 'Diaspora = Jobs'. DDI (Diaspora Direct Investment) is now a legitimate subset of FDI (Foreign Direct Investment). There is a growing realisation that economic models have changed. The old 'core-periphery' model which meant that new products and technologies happened in advanced economies and manufacturing in periphery economies has been replaced by two way flows of skills, capital and technology. Now countries realise that a deep bench of skilled immigrant talent is an essential element of 21st century collaborative advantage. Also migration patterns are changing and efforts are being made to track the increasing trend of immigrants subsequently migrating to another country. This has given rise to 'affinity' Diasporas – for example, Indians or Chinese who spend time overseas and then return to their home countries but retain an affectionate affinity for the country that they spent time in.

8. As economies improve we are going to see large numbers of migrants wanting to connect with and, in some cases, return to live in, their country of origin, heritage or affinity. They will bring back knowledge and experience, connections and finance and a new found sense of optimism and confidence that will be invaluable for their home countries. Although the US has always been seen as the great migrant country, the last decade has seen a change as other countries are catching up and the US advantage is declining. Fewer foreigners are opening new businesses in the US. Canada, Australia and Ireland have higher percentages of foreign born citizens than does the US. H1B visas in the US have dropped by half and foreign students, who receive half of doctorates in science are heading home. Over half a million western educated Chinese have gone back to China. Known as 'sea turtles' they have brought back what they have learnt overseas and played an important role in China's recent growth. The great thing about migrants is that they allow host countries tap into a vast web of global contacts and networks where ties of kin, clan and sometimes dialect help build trust. Migrant networks can reduce transaction costs for businesses entering foreign markets and create connections between key players which build trust and social capital – critical in countries where the rule of law is weak. The future will see these networks play a larger role in the global economy.

9. Diasporas are an invaluable source of 'soft power'. This was the term coined by Harvard Professor Joseph Nye and refers to the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion. It arises from a country's culture, political ideals and policies. Diaspora members can help a country build soft power or, as it sometimes referred to, 'smart power'. By implementing a comprehensive diaspora strategy this can be harnessed and converted into 'hard impacts'. Diasporas are in a good position to influence what people think of home countries and help the national image and be part of a country's 'nation branding'. They are also a powerful way to spread messages and narratives about the home country and, as such, can be viewed as 'low cost foreign policy'.

10. There is an increasing sense of the distinction between the 'nation' and the 'state' and, that in this area of globalisation, we have to redefine the concept of the nation. There is a sense that the nation is no longer purely territorial and not bounded by lines on a map and confined geographically. The nation then becomes a 'global notion'. Professor Anne Marie Slaughter of Princeton University has written extensively of how she believes the information age is over and we now live in the networked age. In this world the measurement of power is connectedness. The vertical world of hierarchies has been replaced by the horizontal world of networks. In this world the state with the most and best connections will be the central player able to set the global agenda, unlock innovation and sustainable growth. Success is about connected clusters of creative people and only the connected will survive. Key is centrality in a dense global web and collecting the best ideas from around the world. The world, she says, is more a mosaic than a melting pot and now, where you are from, means where you can, and do, go back and whom you know and trust enough to network with.

Key Factors for Success

A country's Diaspora constitutes an immense source of 'Soft Power'. By implementing a comprehensive Diaspora Engagement strategy this can be harnessed and converted into 'hard impacts'. The ultimate objective is always to achieve the 'triple win' - benefits for the Diaspora, the host country and the home country.

1. Data

The first key factor for success in engaging the Diaspora is about knowing who they are, where they are and what are they doing. This is all about building profiles and collecting data which tends to be dispersed in lots of different areas and owned by lots of different groups. Collating it can be challenging. Technology can facilitate and organisations like LinkedIn and Namsor make the challenge easier. Increasingly networks of shared interests are being developed such as business, culture and sport.

2. Successful and vulnerable

Countries' Diasporas tend to include those who have been very successful and those who struggle and a large number in between. A comprehensive Diaspora strategy should incorporate strategies to engage all the different categories. Through this approach 'tipping agents' can be identified – people who can 'nudge' decisions in favour of their home country. These 'change agents' can be important in areas like Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and its subset Diaspora Direct Investment (DDI). They can help in nation branding and promoting a country's 'national narrative' abroad. Through mentorship programmes, internships, work placements, exchanges and bursaries they can be involved in 'talent acceleration' of people in the home country. The key here is 'asks and tasks' with key individuals and groups engaged in specific tasks with timelines and measurable outcomes. The US University Alumni model is an interesting analogy with their focus on mass participation at modest levels and the very heavy involvement by a small number.

3. Many Diasporas

Countries and their Diasporas vary and there is no 'one size fits all'. Diasporas can be distant, diverse, diffuse and disputatious. It is important to accept that there are many Diasporas and they all have different needs and require different approaches. What is needed is to develop a wide array of networks bearing in mind that people join different networks at different times for different reasons often reflecting 'key life changes'. For example, next generation initiatives may be very different from 'baby boomer' programmes.

4. Return not always necessary

Although there are programmes aimed at getting the Diaspora to return to, for example, China, Malaysia and Ireland it is important to realise that they do not have to return to be effective and play a significant role. In some cases they can be more effective for their home country by achieving prominence in their host countries.

5. Audit other countries

Diaspora engagement is a non-competitive industry (somebody going to help Poland is probably not interested in Palestine or Portugal) and so countries should be willing to share as much as possible and learn from each other. A good start is to audit what other countries are doing and use this information to devise programmes that work. A good example here is Ireland's global tourism initiative, the Gathering, in 2013, which learnt much from the Scottish Homecoming initiative in 2009.

6. All about place

Diaspora engagement is often more about a place than a country. The place could be a region, town, village or even an organisation like a university, company or sports team. We are seeing the emergence of city and company Diaspora strategies.

7. Give not get

It is important to think what can be given to the Diaspora rather than always thinking what can be got from them. People in the Diaspora often feel the only time there are contacted is when people from the home country are looking for something, usually money. Then they are ignored until more money is needed.

8. Role of government

The best role of government, if possible, is as facilitator rather than implementer of Diaspora activities. It has a key role in giving its 'imprimatur' and support making clear to people in the Diaspora that they are being listened to and that their views and opinions are important and count. Government has a key role in establishing institutions and making legislative changes to support policies and programmes. If the market doesn't deliver effective activity then the government may have to intervene to 'kickstart' activities.

9. Philanthropy as portal

Remittances and philanthropy can be the early activity that leads on further and more extensive involvement.

10. Meetings

Regular and relevant meetings in the home and host countries are key to keeping Diaspora members involved, informed and engaged. They need to feel they are being listened to and involved in decision making. Embassies and consulates play a role here.

11. Extended citizenship and representation.

Over 115 countries now extend voting rights in their elections to their Diasporas and this is an effective way to make people feel part of a global entity.

12. Recognise and Reward

Many countries have programmes of recognition for exceptional performance of members of the Diaspora.

13. Culture

Culture is the underlying glue that can bridge Diaspora strategies and is all about creativity, innovation and personality. Other countries' agencies such as the British Council, Alliance Francaise, the Goethe Institute and the Confucius Institutes recognise this and invest considerable resources in the promotion of their culture overseas.

14. Diasporise

The challenge for many advocates is to bring greater prominence to this topic in their home countries and draw attention to the possibilities. This means convincing government, the media, the business sector, academics and educationalists, trade unionists, NGOs and communications specialists of the potential that exists and the positive mutual benefits that will accrue by developing a comprehensive national Diaspora strategy and funding it appropriately.

15. Networking

The key factor for success in all of the above is to become effective networkers on a worldwide basis. Countries in a hugely competitive and interdependent world need to have their global friends. Networking is essentially about 'giving' not 'getting', being great listeners and building long term hearts and minds sustainable relationships. There is a process behind networking which is a 4 step approach of Research, Cultivation, Solicitation and Stewardship. Networking is not taught at schools or colleges and organisations don't have strategies for it. Countries need to train their representatives to be global networkers with their Diasporas.

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