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SERBIAN DIASPORA VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY: HUMAN RESOURCE POTENTIAL

Abstract: *The increasing potential of various forms of diaspora capital (intellectual, social and financial) provides fertile ground for research studies on different aspects of diaspora. On the other hand, policy makers need to acknowledge that diaspora is not only an unexploited national resource, but diaspora communities are also marginalized constituencies.*

As transnational structure, described as "societal relations spanning pluri-locally above and between the traditional container spaces of national societies" (Pries, 2005), converts into Diaspora, when "motherland" becomes apparent, a transnational community of experts in diaspora may develop into a diaspora virtual university. In fact, diaspora virtual university may be the nucleus and, eventually, the hub of congregation of experts that live in Diaspora.

The model of the Serbian Diaspora Virtual University (SDVU) embodies a framework designed to enhance transformation of brain drain into brain gain through brain chain (networks) and the enabling processes for the purpose of improving administration performance.

The paper presents the results of the research done to gain an insight into magnitude and diversity of diaspora human resource potential, which is both the stimulus and "warp and woof" of the diaspora virtual university. The results (data base of more than 5000 experts) show that practically there is no a single field (academic, research, cultural, entrepreneurial, sport) in which Serbian diaspora is not significantly represented. It is presumed that the situation is similar to other nations with significant diaspora. The findings are further generalised to corroborate claims of the importance of diaspora virtual universities for the creation of knowledge economy frameworks in other countries with significant diaspora.

Key words: *diaspora virtual university, Serbian diaspora, diaspora networks, expert diaspora, brain-chain, complex leadership*

VIRTUELNI UNIVERZITET SRPSKE DIJASPORE: POTENCIJAL LJUDSKIH RESURSA

Sažetak: *Veći potencijal različitih oblika kapitala dijaspore (intelektualni, društveni i finansijski) daje plodno tlo za istraživanja o različitim aspektima dijaspore. S druge strane, donosioci načela u politici treba da priznaju da dijaspora nije samo neiskorišteni nacionalni resurs, već su i zajednice dijaspore takođe marginalizovane izborne jedinice.*

Dok se transnacionalna struktura, opisana kao "društveni odnosi koji se rasprostiru pluri-lokalno iznad i između tradicionalnih okvira prostora nacionalnih društava" (Pries, 2005), pretvara u dijasporu kada "domovina" postaje očigledna, transnacionalna zajednica stručnjaka u dijaspori može se razviti u dijasporu virtualnog univerziteta. U stvari, dijaspora virtualnog univerziteta može biti jezgro i, konačno, središte zajednice stručnjaka koji žive u dijaspori.

Model Virtuelnog Univerziteta Srpske Dijaspore (SDVU) predstavlja okvir dizajniran kako bi se poboljšala transformacija odliva mozgova u sticanje mozgova ljudi kroz "lanac mozgova" ljudi (mreže), i poboljšao taj proces u cilju poboljšanja performansi uprave.

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U radu su prikazani rezultati istraživanja koje je sprovedeno da se dobije uvid u veličinu i raznolikost potencijala ljudskih resursa u dijaspori, koja je i podsticaj i "potka, pa čak i osnova" virtualnog univerziteta dijaspore. Rezultati (baza podataka od više od 5000 stručnjaka) pokazuju da gotovo nema jednog polja (akademskog, istraživačkog, kulturnog, preduzetništva, sporta) u kome srpska dijaspora nije značajno zastupljena. Pretpostavlja se da je slična situacija sa ostalim narodima sa velikim dijasporama. Rezultati su dalje generalizovani da bi na potkrepili tvrdnje o važnosti virtualnog univerziteta dijaspore za stvaranje okvira ekonomskog znanja u drugim zemljama sa važnim dijasporama.

Ključne reči: virtualni univerzitet dijaspore, srpska dijaspora, mreže dijaspora, stručne dijaspore, lanac mozgova, kompleksno vođstvo

Introduction

The increasing potential of various forms of diaspora capital (intellectual, social and financial) has provided fertile ground for countless theoretically-based research studies on different aspects of diaspora, as well as debates and documents, such as the European declaration on diasporas (Barcelona declaration)*. On the other hand, policy makers need to acknowledge that diaspora is not only an unexploited national resource, but diaspora communities are also marginalized constituencies (Gamlen, 2005).

Yet this growth trend is not reflected in the literature with respect to empirically-based studies. Research into mobilizing structures, such as networks of individuals and organizations furnished with appropriate leadership, bound to the same issue or formal organizations established for the purpose of common goals is non-existent. The literature still remains, for all practical purposes, devoid of empirical research conducted within the intersecting realms of complex leadership, leadership for quality and experts in diaspora. This research gap needs to be addressed by the research community, as well as the administrations of both sending and receiving countries, including the EU. The proposed study is directed toward that end by theoretically and empirically exploring the premise that experts in diaspora are a complex organization, that they can be mobilized for a noble cause, embodied through creation of Diaspora virtual university, if appropriate leadership for quality is provided.

The meaning and definition of diaspora

Diaspora is a transnational network (as Samuel Huntington (2004) phrases it, they 'cut across state boundaries'); it is a self-identified cultural community that includes dispersed people who retain a sense of their uniqueness and maintain links with its place of origin. To be a diaspora, a group needs more than to be an aggregation of expatriates; the members of the community have to continue to identify with their nation of origin, and to nurture ties both among themselves and with the motherland. If not, the group is not diaspora but dispersal.

Determinants of diaspora are not the citizenship of the motherland, ability to speak its language, birthplace of the ancestors of diaspora members, the number of generations since emigration, but instead, it is the connectedness to the motherland and among the diaspora members. It can persist or fade away over time, which depends partly on the cultures of the sending and receiving countries, but mainly on the individual (Fullilove, 2008). As Bailey et al. (2002) notices, people in diaspora may be in a state of 'permanent temporariness'.

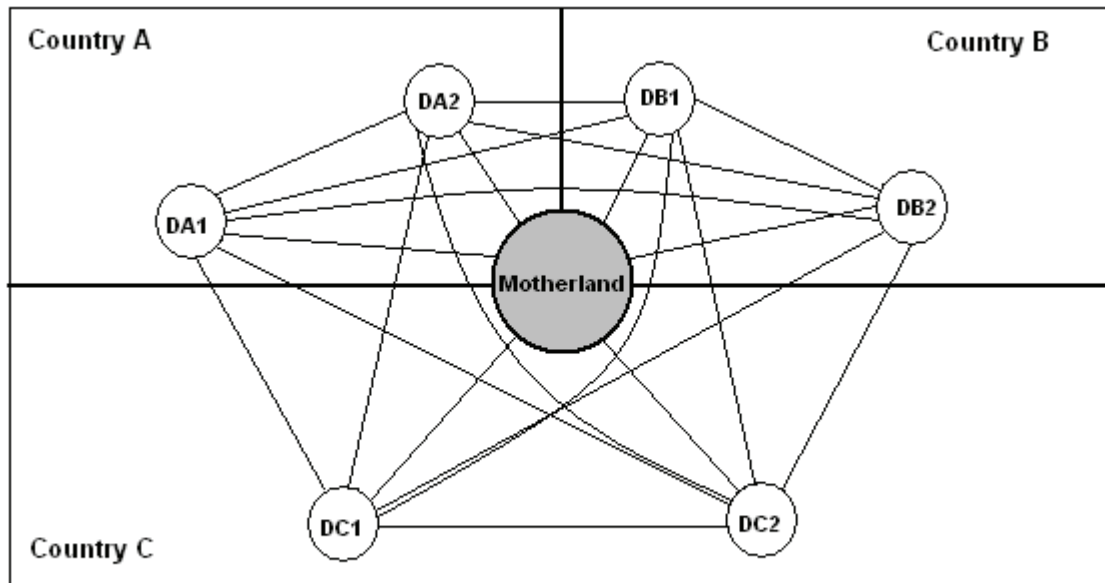
To some authors the main uniqueness of diaspora is its transnational existence and cosmopolitan consciousness (Boyarin and Boyarin, 1993). Similarly, to others diasporas poses characteristics of both, ethnic parochial and cosmopolitan creations (Werbner, 2002). Fullilove (2008) pictures diasporas as 'world wide webs' emanating from nations, with dense, intertwining, treads spanning the globe and binding different individuals, institutions and countries together (Fullilove, 2008).

As Werbner (2002) lucidly states "diaspora is a place which is both a non-place and a multiplicity of places; a place marked by difference...this place emerges chaordically, without centralized command structures, but in a highly predictable fashion." Here, the term chaord comes from a blending of chaos and order. Hock explains that "By Chaord, I mean any self-organizing, adaptive, non-linear, complex organism, organization or community, whether physical, biological or social, the behavior of which harmoniously blends characteristics of both order and chaos. Briefly stated, a chaord is any chaotically-ordered complex. Loosely translated to social organizations, it would mean the harmoniously blending of intellectual and experiential

learning (Hock, 1996). The organizations of the future—chaordic organizations—will embody community, based on shared purpose calling to the higher aspirations of people.”

In referring to modern diasporas, Sheffer (1986) offers the following definition: “Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands”.

Werbner (2002) defines diaspora as a transnational network of places populated by dispersed political subjects, connected by ties of co-responsibility across the boundaries of nations. In reality, diaspora is the whole World minus the place of origin, the Motherland (Figure 1).



Diaspora: Transnational network of places populated by dispersed political subjects, connected by ties of co-responsibility across the boundaries of nations (def. by P. Werbner).

Figure 1: Diaspora as a transnational network of places

Members of Diaspora (diasporans) of a particular nation are defined as all those people of its descent and heritage living outside the country and territories where they are autochthonous population, irrespective of their citizenship, ability to speak the language, birthplace of their ancestors, the number of generations since emigration and who consider the state at issue as their Motherland, and remain committed to contribute to its prosperity.

Here, we propose a pragmatic criterion, which accurately specifies who are the members of diaspora of a country, and might be used for all practical purposes. If people live outside the country and territories where they are autochthonous population, and always support its sports national teams, irrespective of who their rival is (even the countries of their current citizenship) they are considered to be the members of its diaspora.

Although we have arrived at a workable definition of diaspora, the recent introduction of the terms ‘S&T diasporas’, ‘intellectual diaspora’, ‘expert diaspora’ or ‘knowledge diaspora’ have caused ambiguous interpretations. In recent literature, the term ‘scientific diasporas’ was defined as a “self-organized community of expatriate scientists and engineers working to develop their home country or region, mainly in science, technology, and education” (Barre et al., 2003). Similarly, we can define expert diaspora, having in mind that experts are the top performers who excel in a particular field, have respectable experience, accomplishments, current and past employment history and professional relationships. They also must possess and continually demonstrate a superlative understanding within their respective realm. Especially important for successful contribution to the prosperity of their motherlands is not only declarative and procedural knowledge, but also attitudes, and the so-called *enculturation*, in which professionals acquire skills, attitudes and habits of a certain profession and become accepted and legitimized in certain context (Boshuizen et al., 2004).

From brain drain to brain gain, through brain chain

The term ‘brain drain’ designates the movement of human capital in which the net flow of expertise is predominantly in one direction (Salt, 1997). The use of the word ‘brain’ pertains to any skill, knowledge, scientific potential, competency or characteristic that is valued as a potential asset. ‘Drain’ indicates very high, usually undesirable, outflow. Coupled, the two label the loss of the most talented people (Bushnell and Choy, 2001). Here, “talent” means a quality defined as “natural ability and superior performance in some area of human endeavor” and indicated by level of income (L.E.K Consulting 2001). The term ‘brain drain’ has a basically negative connotation, namely one that suggests a loss of vital resources. The counter arguments, mostly in the developed world, are that this kind of migration is one way of preventing “brain waste”, which stand for different kinds of waste of intellectual potential (Meyer, 2003).

The essence of the “brain gain” hypothesis is that intellectual and technical elites who emigrated from developing to developed countries represent a valuable human resource potential, instrumental for the socioeconomic progress of their homelands. It was long believed that increase in human capital stock, necessary for the development of their countries, is best achieved through remigration of these elites. This idea was supported by quantitative and qualitative arguments. Namely, the quantitative argument is about the people who are returning and who are to compensate the numerical loss, whereas the qualitative argument is about the intellectual, social and financial gains, achieved through studies, work, professional ties and certificates while staying in diaspora (Hunger, 2002).

In the diaspora lies precious intellectual, social and financial capital that sending countries must seek and nurture through networks and alliances (“brain chains”). Mobilization of this latent ‘national’ resource, as Gamlen (2005) calls it, through such connectivity programs do not require a large infrastructural investment, which is the advantage of any diaspora option. On the other hand, policy makers need to acknowledge that diaspora is not only an unexploited national resource, but diaspora communities are also marginalized constituencies (Gamlen, 2005). Assumption that many expatriates are not likely to return, at least in the short term, is the bases for significant number of diaspora policies.

Transnational expert networks

Roger (2000) points out that the most important issue in the attitude towards expert diaspora is how they are engaged from the distance. It is essential to establish partnerships with them, to make them parts of the milieu. In return, their networks, communities of practice and knowledge communities, will be at our disposal to implement their practices, gather local intelligence, exchange, develop, and apply knowledge, provide contacts, link into joint ventures and find talent to use for specific projects (SIAC, 2001). In order to build the model of the transnational expert networks we need to define its constituent elements; communities of practice and knowledge communities.

Community of practice is defined as: A group or network of individuals who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting with each other on an ongoing basis (Wenger et al., 2002). Here, the term domain refers to a shared competence that distinguishes members from other groups or individuals. A domain could be a group of microbiologists working on a similar problem or a network of educators exploring virtual university. A CoP shares technology, language, culture, and common ways of addressing recurring problems. Figure 2 depicts a transnational network of experts within a community of practice.

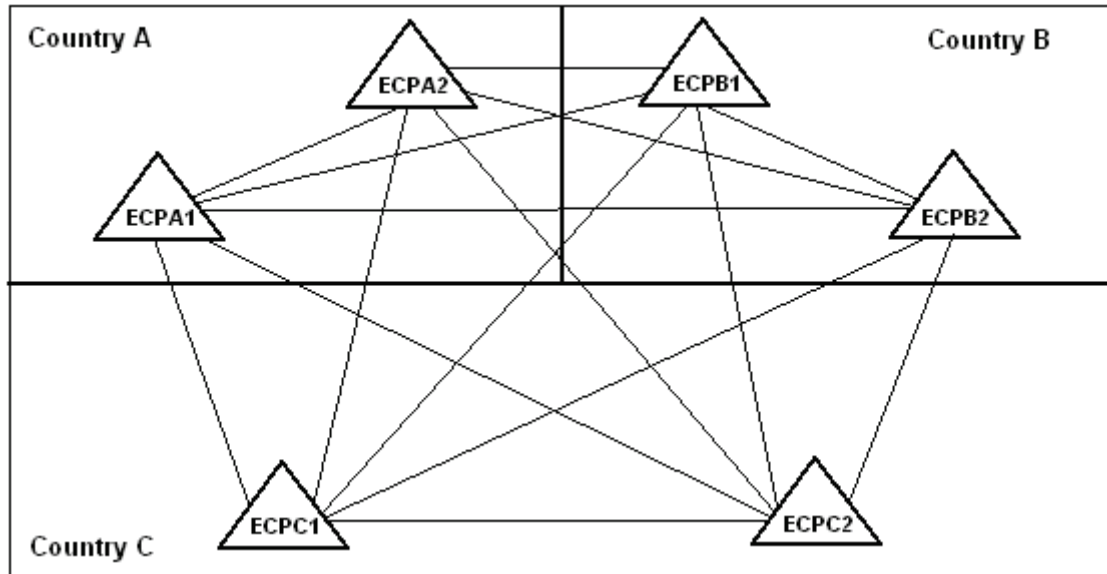


Figure 2: Transnational network of experts within a community in practice

A **knowledge community** is a group of people who are engaged in capturing, sharing, and applying professional knowledge, to address particular issues. Connecting “islands of knowledge” they need to establish a knowledge-sharing network. Such communities bring together different perspectives, transcending specific disciplines. They exchange, develop, and apply knowledge. (Skyrme, 1999) As any other complex system, which are more social than structural, such organizations are usually self-organized (Pinchot & Pinchot, 1993). Perhaps the most recognised free knowledge community is Wikipedia, a free and open online encyclopedia that any one can edit. Similar representation to the one in Figure 2, can be drawn for a transnational network of experts within a knowledge community (instead of ECP_{ij} we would have EKC_{ij} , where $i=A,B,C\dots$ and $j=1,2,3\dots$).

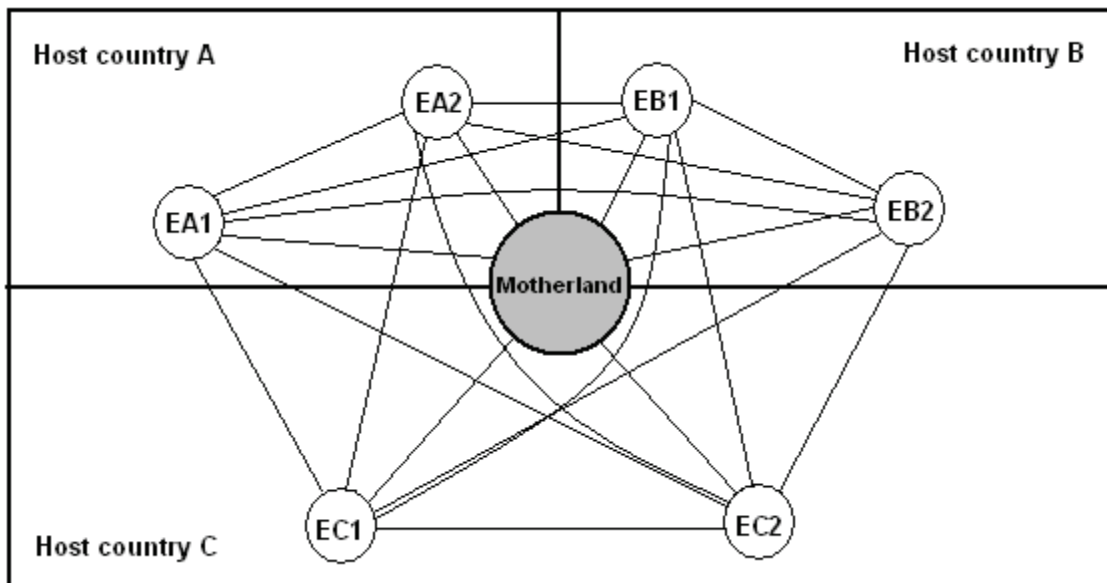


Figure 3: Transnational network of experts in diaspora

If a member of the expert diaspora is at the same time a member of community of practice, then E_{ij} (Figure 3) equals ECP_{ij} . Similarly, if a member of the expert diaspora is at the same time a member of knowledge community, then E_{ij} equals EKC_{ij} . It is possible, and it often happens, that a member of expert diaspora is simultaneously member of more than one community of practice and knowledge community and that within a single community of practice or knowledge community there are more than one member of expert diaspora of a particular nation. This is how the members of expert diaspora enrich their expertise and bring it in the

diaspora networks, from where it is further channeled to the institutions, companies and individuals in the motherland, optimistically through Diaspora virtual university .

Diaspora virtual university

As transnational structure, being described as “societal relations spanning pluri-locally above and between the traditional container spaces of national societies” (Pries, 2005), converts into diaspora when “motherland” becomes apparent (Figure 1), a transnational community of experts in diaspora may develop into a diaspora virtual university (Figure 2). In fact, diaspora virtual university may be the nucleus and, eventually, the hub of congregation of experts living in diaspora.

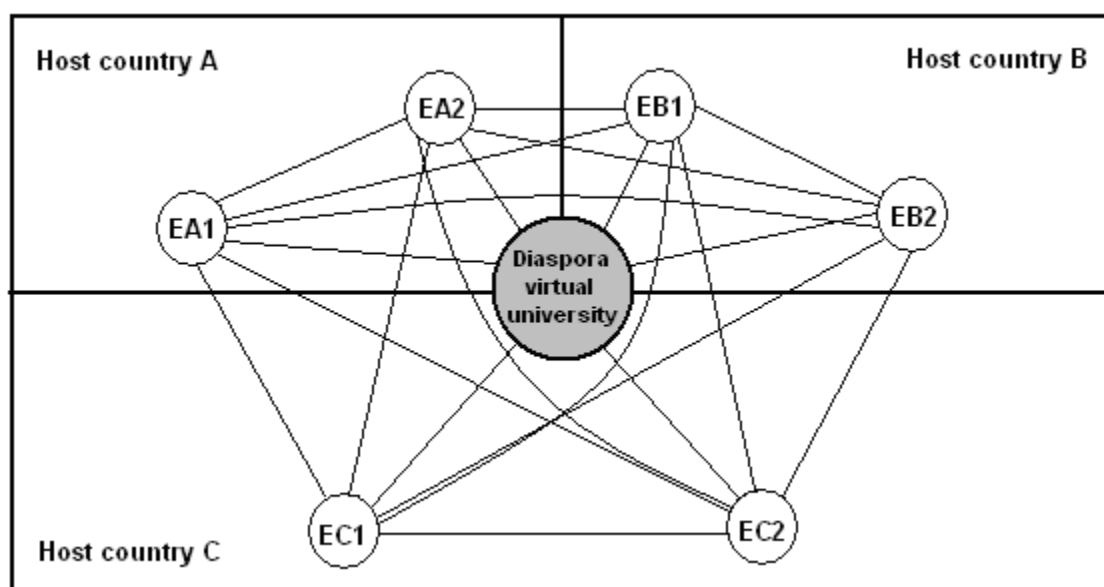


Figure 4: Diaspora virtual university as the nucleus and hub of congregation of experts living in diaspora

Diaspora virtual university is not necessarily a university as we know it, not necessarily an alternative to or challenger of any actually existing university but rather an emergent property of the networking of experts in diaspora, across disciplines, across institutional, cultural, or national borders (Weislogel, 2005), people working at institutional university, entrepreneurs, researchers and policy makers. Here, we develop a constellation of concepts instrumental in envisioning and promoting such an idea (Figure 5).

Talking about Global virtual university, Weislogel, (2005) eloquently also grasps the essence of a Diaspora virtual university: *“I am really thinking more about emergence than artifice. I am wondering if we are seeing the founding of a university that is not brick-and-mortar, not one additional institution, not even one super-institution, but an institution that is not an institution, in some sense. But if this is so, then what governs it? What are its responsibilities? What are its faculties? And if it is an institution which is not an institution, then who belongs to it? To whom does it belong?”*

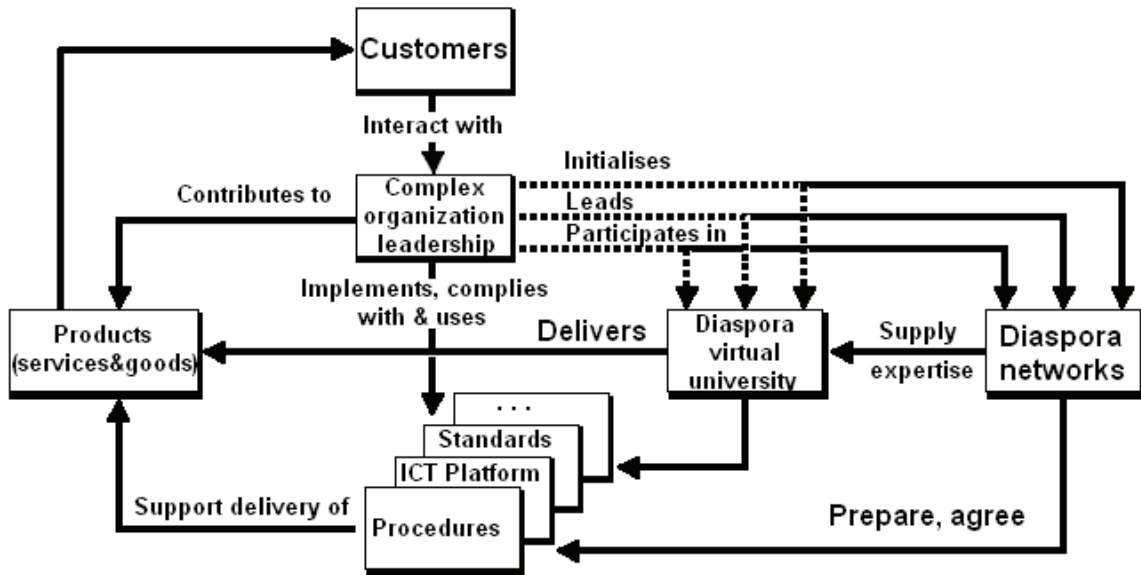


Figure 5: Core concepts of a Diaspora virtual university (modification of the scheme by Bohl, 2008)

The very texture of Diaspora virtual university, woven by the complex organization (such as that of experts in diaspora) leadership, promotes the processes which counter the ones described by Gregorian (2004), President of the Carnegie Corporation: *“The fundamental problem underlying the disjointed curriculum is the fragmentation of knowledge itself. Higher education has atomized knowledge [...] breaking it up into smaller and smaller unconnected fragments of academic specialization, even as the world looks to colleges for help in integrating and synthesizing the exponential increases in information brought about by technological advances. The trend has serious ramifications. [...] We must reform higher education to reconstruct the unity and value of knowledge. [...] complexity of the world requires us to have a better understanding of the relationships and connections between all [academic] fields that intersect and overlap.”*

Figure 5 depicts a network of Diaspora virtual universities of different nations, which is a community of practice and knowledge community itself, and as such might be used to create mutually important practices and share and apply professional knowledge .

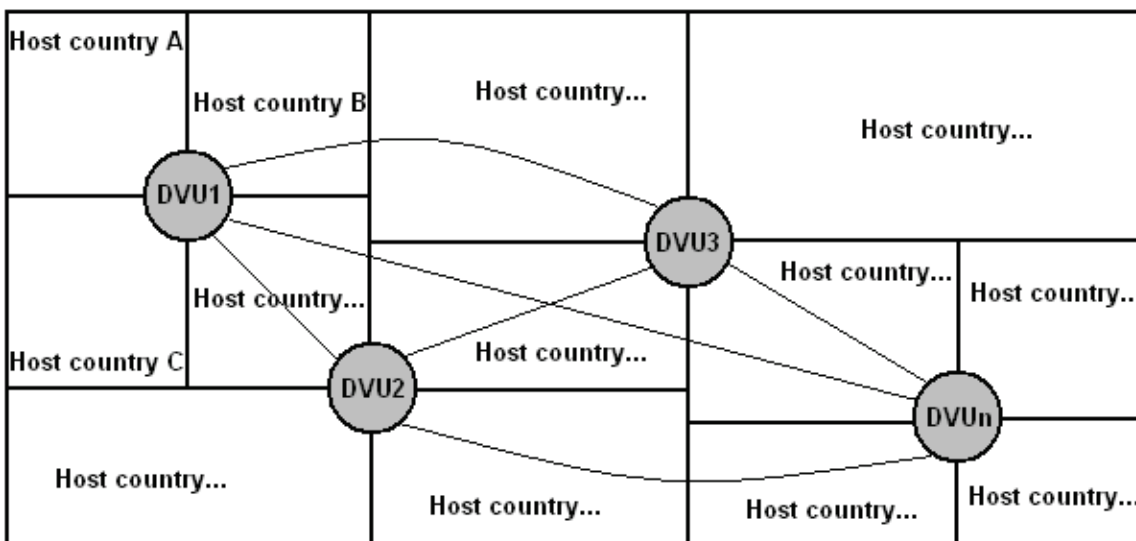


Figure 5: Network of Diaspora virtual universities of different nations

Serbian Diaspora Virtual University (SDVU)

Here, we draw conclusions based on the results of research done to gain an insight into magnitude and diversity of Serbian diaspora human resource potential, which is both the stimulus and “warp and woof” of the diaspora virtual university. The results (data base of more than 5000 experts) show that practically there is no a single field (academic, research, cultural, entrepreneurial, sport) in which Serbian diaspora is not significantly represented. We presume that the situation is similar with other nations with significant diaspora.

Foundation of a such university may be instrumental in expanding the Serbian academic, research, and cultural space across the World and uniting the experts under one corps. This academic, research, cultural and sports institution would help Serbia to integrate with the rest of the World, with the participation of its diaspora. SDVU would conduct its work as both a virtual and traditional university. The educational, research and cultural potentials of the SDVU are represented by Serbia’s experts living in the diaspora, the potential partners of Serbia and the Serbian people. The potential partners within the country are the School of Electrical Engineering and the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, both faculties of the University of Belgrade, the Faculty of Technical Sciences, a faculty of the University of Novi Sad and the Faculty of Electronics in Nis (with the potential participation from other universities, including privately owned ones).

In its early stages, it would organize individual lectures from around the World meant for display in Serbia, and vice versa, from Serbia, viewable throughout the entire World. In co-operation with various universities in Serbia, the SDVU would participate in master and doctoral research ventures and would organize televised defenses of doctoral and master theses, with university professors from around the World as members of the committees. In time, SDVU would organize lectures in undergraduate, specialist, master and doctoral studies intended for Serbia and the World, as well as internet and video lectures for the Serbian youth around the World. Formed from the positive experience of world renowned universities, SDVU would give special care towards establishing a sound quality management system.

Using the existing diaspora experts database, SDVU would allow Serbia and the Serbian people a unique and harmonized approach, as well as an equal opportunity, to the world market of projects, competitions, sponsorships, scholarships and donations.

Through various programs, SDVU would make efforts to revive its industry and help new entrepreneurial endeavours with the help of experts in diaspora support, including provision of technology know-how through license agreements and advertising important managerial and administrative positions in Serbia to the members of its expert diaspora. Other forms of transfer of expertise would include provision of consulting services to different levels of government, encouraging political engagement of Serbian citizens in diaspora, mentoring startup managers and providing angel investments by experienced entrepreneurs (Devesh, 2001), as well as building of new and improvement of existing diaspora business networks (Newland, 2004). The SDVU would be used as a platform for the improvement of national health care system through sabbatical residences of medical doctors and other medical staff in diaspora.

SDVU would help in the coordination and outlet of science research based academic organizations onto the international scene. Also, it would dedicate special attention in the fulfillment of its mission statement regarding its sports endeavors.

SDVU would create the ability of tutelage for the gifted youth in the fields of science, culture and sport, and most importantly, provide the tutelage and care for their involvement within the Serbian intellectual corps. It would function as a coordinator for benchmarking activities and the transfer of technologies within the fields of scientific research, education and entrepreneurship and would organize conferences, seminars and workshops in collaboration with local counterpart organizations, as well as visits from delegations from its field of work, from around the World.

The required means necessary for the fulfillment of this project are adequate leadership, upgrading of the existing database, the purchase of the necessary office space and equipment, media coverage, adequate and government policy aimed at providing necessary support and the organizational activities.

Conclusions and recommendations

As transnational structure described as “societal relations spanning pluri-locally above and between the traditional container spaces of national societies” (Pries, 2005), converts into diaspora when “motherland”

becomes apparent, a transnational community of experts in diaspora may develop into a diaspora virtual university. In fact, diaspora virtual university may be the nucleus and, eventually, the hub of congregation of experts living in diaspora. Here, we draw conclusions based on the results of research done to gain an insight into magnitude and diversity of Serbian diaspora human resource potential, which is both the stimulus and “warp and woof” of the diaspora virtual university. The results (data base of more than 5000 experts) show that practically there is no a single field (academic, research, cultural, entrepreneurial, sport) in which Serbian diaspora is not significantly represented. For the future, we recommend empirically-based exploratory research on leadership for quality in complex organizations with a focus on determining its applicability on experts in diaspora. This new conceptualized leadership model for complex organizations, based on the existing complex leadership theory, would be developed and used in creating the survey instrument for the empirical portion of this study. This new model would embody a framework designed to enhance transformation of brain drain into brain gain through brain chain (networks). In addition, the model will add to the literature, a proposed method of building a coherent interface between experts in diaspora and administration.

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Appendix:

Excerpt from: THE BARCELONA DECLARATION (Barcelona, January 2005)

1. The Diasporas of Europe form an integral part of the peoples of Europe... They number in the millions and include many different groups, cultures, and religions.
2. We understand "Diasporas of Europe" to be enduring human networks and communities, whose membership is entirely voluntary... Diaspora communities are thus a part of several overlapping identities, alongside national, European and other layers of belonging. Diasporas differ from other immigrant groups and territorial minorities in that local communities and individuals maintain links with others dispersed around the globe. These act as very real emotional and material resources.
3. Thanks to these dispersals, migrations, and linkages, Diasporas can contribute to the European project and to the development of a substantial European citizenship through their experiences of cross-cultural

understanding, in adapting to new environments, in multilingualism, and in pioneering a pan-European identity. Moreover, these personal contacts, business relations, affinities for and knowledge of third countries may work to the EU's advantage in terms of external and trade relations...

4. We invite all concerned to develop projects promoting cooperation between Diaspora networks, and between them and public authorities in all fields. We will in particular promote the creation of a Forum of European Diasporas⁴ in the spirit of this declaration and invite all interested to join us in this venture.