

In Focus: Southeast European Scientific Diaspora

Ines Marinkovic

Centre for Social Innovation, Vienna, Austria
marinkovic@zsi.at

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1 Introduction

There is a long history of outmigration from Southeast European countries, creating large population groups residing abroad (mostly in EU countries and USA) and are usually referred to as SEE diaspora, SEE emigrants, SEE expatriates etc. Regarding scientific diaspora and brain drain, the governments in the region - being aware of related challenges for the overall economies - have recently undertaken a number of initiatives to address the issue. These include several of the traditional measures, from creation of directory databases, “knowledge networks,” and discussion forums to the provision of visiting and post-doctorate fellowships.

2 Large potential source of internalization of research

When it comes to the scientific diaspora from the region of the former Yugoslavia plus Albania, one can observe in different national and regional strategies (e.g. WB Regional R&D Strategy for Innovation, Strategy of Scientific and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia 2010-2015; Resolution on Migration Policy of the Republic of Macedonia 2009 etc.) and implemented national and regional programmes (“Unity through Knowledge Fund”, Croatia, 2007-2013; “Brain Gain Programme”, Albania, 2006-2013; “Western Balkans Brain Gain Programme” funded by Austrian Development Agency 2002-2011 etc.) that this group of people is increasingly recognised by the governments as an important policy priority.

The scientific diaspora is seen i.a. as a “*large potential source of internalization of research*” and possibility to “*strengthen the research excellence in the region*”. Furthermore, scholars from the region and SEE scientific diaspora addressed the issues of brain drain – brain gain – brain circulation – scientific diaspora in numerous papers so far. They all agree: first – there is a lack of updated and accurate data on highly

skilled migration from the region; second – although some good practice programmes have been implemented in the region, difficult socio-economic circumstances in these countries still contribute to the ineffectiveness of the related strategies and policies in place. The recent mapped brain gain policies in the Balkans are well presented in Pavlov/Zeneli 2014: [National Brain Gain Policies: Western Balkans](#) (p45-64)

Furthermore, some scholars assume that the established contact databases are *"living dead initiatives or are likely to end up as such. Mapping of diaspora should obviously be linked to other specific cooperation initiatives so that the scientific and professional diaspora can see the purpose of having their contacts in the database."* (p61, [Skilled Migration and Development practices](#), 2014). On the other hand, many scientists in diaspora have never been introduced to those databases.

Please find below some selected excerpts related to current research on SEE scientific diaspora. Even if some of the papers are first published few years ago, the analysis is still valid for the countries in the region.

2.1 *Western Balkans*

The highly educated Diaspora creates an opportunity for a potential gain to the home country. The educated WB expatriates create a pool of potentially useful human capital for the countries of origin. The challenge lies in mobilizing these brains in order to involve them in promoting the economic growth of the region, building a sustainable brain circulation network. WB countries can benefit from other countries' successful experiences, e.g. India, where the partnerships between the private sector and the academia, twinning project with technology institutes from the USA and the technology transfer led by the Silicon Valley Diaspora have greatly influenced the rise of Bangalore as one of the world's IT centers. Institutional factors play a major role in brain circulation. Looking at the examples of India, China, and other countries, returning migrant communities are not replicating Silicon Valley around the world. It is more appropriate to see the emerging regions as hybrids, combining elements of the Silicon Valley industrial system with inherited local institutions and resources (Saxenian, 2005). Universities should motivate talented lecturers and students to spend short periods of research and study abroad. Also, the institution of exchange programs is an excellent means of encouragement of highly educated Diaspora scientists to return to their home country and provide lectures or engage in collaborative projects with their counterparts.

All these endeavors need to rely on stable long-term strategies to promote economic growth and democracy in the WB countries, leaving no way to nepotism and corruption, two of the main culprits for the long socio-economic status quo of the WB countries (Quaked, 2002). The main preconditions for brain circulation can be found in the “well developed scientific infrastructure, higher investments in the science sector, and the stability of a consolidated democratic government that assures human rights and academic freedoms” (Horvat, 2004). (p. 305-320, [Innovation and Brain Drain in the Western Balkans](#), 2014)

2.2 Western Balkans

The fact that brain drain and the difficulty of transforming it into brain gain and brain circulation in the Western Balkans is primarily determined by structural social disruptions is quite discouraging. On the other hand, the solution to both problems (brain drain and social disruptions) lies in their interconnection: it is necessary to find suitable ways to include highly skilled migrants in the economic and democratic development of the region and to accelerate the region’s inclusion in global practices. Encouraging development will encourage brain circulation in turn, and brain circulation will further contribute to development. For this self-sustaining mechanism to start, it is necessary to develop a strategic approach to development and migration. ([Skilled Migration and Development practices](#), 2014)



2.3 Albania, Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia*

As regards brain gain initiatives, even though, in all three countries, to differing levels and degrees, there are several governmental and institutional programs that support the return of highly skilled and educated returnees. The survey results suggest that majority of returnees either were not aware of these programs or had the impression that they were subject to nepotism. These programs clearly need reforming. We believe a comprehensive and coherent policy approach mainstreaming migration into national development plans instead of ad hoc Brain Gain initiatives are likely to be more beneficial. As regards statistics, researchers also confirmed what previous studies had found, i.e., the dearth and inadequate quality of data on migration and the labor markets of the selected countries. The lack of data is more pronounced in the case of Kosovo. Diaspora mapping and creation of a database for distinct categories of migrants can help in mainstreaming migration into development plans. (p56f; [Brain Circulation and the role of Diaspora in the Balkans - Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia](#), 2013)

2.4 Bosnia and Herzegovina

The BiH diaspora option and strategic planning in this regard is still in what could be denoted as an early phase of articulation, since the only state institution explicitly dealing with the diaspora is a Department within the State Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees. In a more advanced phase, the jurisdiction over brain gain policies needs to be broadened to include an array of state actors working on devising an extensive strategy on how to involve its expatriates into the broader national development plan, not to miss the opportunity to utilize the potential this population has for the development of BiH. ([The Scientific Diaspora as the Brain Gain Option: Exploring the Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), 2010)

2.5 Montenegro

In general, initial steps in strengthening collaboration with Montenegro's scientific Diaspora have been made in the right direction: multiple policy documents exist which are in accordance with EU strategies and Diaspora's potential role in the country's development

processes has been recognized. However, much remains to be done as activities in this domain are still at the beginning. Specifically, strategies laid out in policy documents have to be made operational. Moreover, administrative capacity of bodies implementing those strategies may pose an issue. Finally, concrete measures have to be defined and put to practice in order to prevent further brain drain and use global brain circulation trends to the country's full advantage. ([Analytical Study on Montenegrin Scientific Diaspora](#), 2014)

2.6 *Serbia*

On the other hand, brain gain measures in Serbia are integral part of migration and development strategies. (...) Such a model for an institutional brain gain mechanism is good for several reasons; first, because it links the migration strategy and development strategies; second, a coordination mechanism for all stakeholders involved in migration and development is developed; third, the coordination mechanism also includes the local level and it allows highly skilled migrants to contribute to the balanced regional development of the country. What this mechanism lacks is a single brain gain strategy which would clearly define brain gain measures and the budget allocated to them as well as the responsibility of all the actors for its implementation. (...) The consequences of the brain gain measures developed in this way are that the brain gain activities of the respective actors are rare, and if they do exist, they are mostly of the project type. It means that they are short-term activities and that there is no cooperation between the actors in their implementation. Moreover, their effects are not monitored and the lessons learned are not identified and used to develop and improve brain gain policies and programmes. (p57f [Skilled Migration and Development practices](#), 2014)

See also the [WBC-RTL.info article](#) published last month related to capacity building and brain drain / brain gain / scientific diaspora.