

# **Transforming Ukraine from Grainbasket to Brainbasket: The Role of Diaspora**

Rola diaspory w transformacji Ukrainy z gospodarki surowcowej w  
gospodarkę przemysłową

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## **Introduction**

The idea to write this article came up after coming across *How to transform Ukraine's brain drain into brain gain*, written by Bohdan Kupych [2016]. Canadian of Ukrainian descent, Kupych is one of the key figures, playing a critical role in the development of Ukraine's high - tech sector. Not only he is the president of a globally competitive company, which specializes in ICT, microelectronics, and nanotechnology, he also manages, an incubator, in which Ukrainian high - tech startups are being developed.

In his article, the author argues that *emigre entrepreneurs*, accomplished abroad, may play a critical role in exploiting Ukraine's potential as a solid engineering and education base in order to leverage country's tech sector. The expertise and skills, acquired in societies with advanced tech industries, can contribute to the growth of the sector in Ukraine. While, "reorientation to the high - tech path of further development is a single option"[Foresight of Ukrainian Economy 2015, p.14].

With this in mind, the initial aim of the study is to examine what is the current scope of diasporic activity targeted at boosting Ukraine's technology potential. Furthermore, the paper is about to learn the motives of compelled undertakings, which distinguish diaspora from non - Ukrainian entrepreneurs.

In order to achieve these goals, the paper is divided into three parts. The first part explores the definitions of the term *diaspora* and presents the main differences between

diaspora and migration. Thereafter, the case studies of the countries, in which diaspora contributed to development and growth, are reviewed.

Finally, for the purpose of capturing diasporic activity in Ukraine's technology sector, in-depth interview with key informant is conducted. Possessing the relevant features, such as belonging to diaspora community and holding executive role in Ukraine's tech sector, he has been selected as sole key informant for the investigation. The results of the qualitative method applied, are followed - up by summary and conclusions.

Yet, the study possesses geographic limitations. More explicitly, the findings of the methodology are reduced to one country, represented by the informant. In turn, diaspora, as the name suggests, is dispersed around the world. Hence, the research issue is revealed only through the prism of one state, hosting the target group, not diaspora community on the whole. Thereupon, the future studies will be dedicated to gradually address the gaps.

In either case, the research will contribute to deepening the knowledge of the subject for all the stakeholders - Ukraine as a nation - state, its foreign investors, policymakers, and academics. Most importantly, the paper can draw attention of diasporic entrepreneurs, considering establishing their activity in Ukraine.

## **What Is Diaspora and Why It Differs from Migration?**

The definition of the word diaspora has a broad sense. One of the earliest mentions of diaspora was made by the Greeks, who used the verb διασπείρω (diaspeirō), which meant scattering seeds [Herodotus, as cited in Constant & Zimmermann 2016, p. 1111]. Just like the seedling, it designates diaspora's tendency of naturalizing to a new territory - through making its new roots, dispersal and cultural expansion.

However, the term doesn't relate exclusively to Greeks. Millennia later, Totolian [1991] maintained that "diaspora once described Jewish, Greek, and Armenian dispersion now shares meanings with a larger semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest- worker, exile community, overseas community, ethnic

community” [Totolian 1991, p.4]. The author simply defines the term as “the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” [Totolian 1991, p.5].

Totolian quotes the Gulf War in order to confirm the legitimacy of a nation-state. Even if country’s strictly defined borders are in a state of erosion, to extent of losing its sovereignty, the nationhood struggles to be preserved. The Tibetans, Kurds as well as Palestinians may serve as an example. Their homeland is retained in their consciousness as the cradle of culture and identity, however, it doesn’t exist as a state any longer.

Regardless of whether diaspora has its own state or not, Safran [1991, p.83] grants it inherent features. These are a history of spreading out, nostalgia for the homeland and providing support to it, alienation in the host country and desire to return eventually - all resulting in a strong sense of collective identity. Whereas, returning back home is rather considered as a myth, which strengthens the ethnic bonds when religion no longer can. Diaspora members don’t go back for good to a homeland. This is either due to losing political, ideological, and social self - identification with a state or because of inconvenience and disruption of their lifestyle.

All in all, many similarities can be found in diverse works, describing diaspora, however, it is of different formulations. Constant and Zimmermann [2016] profoundly investigated the etymology of the term in order to specify that “diaspora is a well - defined group of migrants or those with migrant background with a joined cultural identity and ongoing identification (active or dormant) with the country or culture of origin as they perceive it” [Constant and Zimmermann, p.1113].

This interpretation, as well as other diaspora discourses, typically revolve around experiences of relocation, of settling down in a new place. Although, very often diaspora is associated with immigrants, a variety of collective experiences, characterizing both terms, report considerable differences between their nature. Both for immigrants and diaspora, mobility is a pre-conditional action, that has to be taken for them to exist. Whereas migration anticipates the mobility of one person, a family or a community, diaspora never relates to an individual. In turn, it is about “the stock of immigrants in several countries for many years” [Constant and Zimmermann 2016, p.1113].

Furthermore, in contrast to migration - connecting both flows and stocks, diaspora exclusively hints at stocks and can even represent the country's citizens of a foreign descent, whose ethnic identity towards their homeland is latent, but can change into an active once the intervention occurs.

Another difference between migration and diaspora can be found in Clifford's [1994] narrating, "in assimilationist national ideologies such as those of the United States, immigrants may experience loss and nostalgia, but only en route to a whole new home in a new place" [Clifford, p.307]. The statement illuminates tendency of individuals to integrate with a new national community quite smoothly. Diaspora, on the other hand, perceived as groups dispersed in different countries, cultivating strong ties with a homeland, cannot assimilate that easily.

People within those groups are unified by sense of identity, which is composed by collective experiences of displacement, of abandoning their ancestral homeland voluntarily or coercively. Hence, this common background and historical evidence cannot be eliminated for them to fully assimilate.

Apart of a subconscious feeling of belonging, both political and socioeconomic factors distinguish diaspora from migration. Constant and Zimmermann [2016, p.1114] contend, that words migration and immigrants are typically related to a host country, raising up discussion about economic outcomes. Migration also oscillates around the policies regarding a number of people, arriving in a host country, as well as the specifics of skills they can offer on its labor market.

For instance, in Europe public discourse is mainly focused on the domestic policies, projecting naturalization, integration and multicultural society. Whereas, in the US debate, the main emphasis is on illegal immigrants. Diaspora, in turn, is never linked to undocumented. In terms of policies, diaspora is way more related to a home country and its economic development than migration is.

Furthermore, diaspora can support a home country through lobbying its economic and political interests. Diasporic lobbying power can even lead to changing ruling governments and political regimes in their home countries. On the other hand, diaspora can mediate and

help to resolve an armed conflict, in which the host country is involved. This way, diasporas become informal actors, having an impact on the host country's foreign policy.

### **Building A Country from Abroad**

It goes without saying that economic betterment of life is the main initial objective for diaspora to move to another country. Yet, it is not the ultimate goal. According to Nikolova et al. [2016, p.5] "looking at migration's effects only in terms of objective or subjective well - being is important, yet furnishes an incomplete perspective about the broader social consequences of emigration" [Nikolova et al]. The authors proved that out-migration has a direct positive impact on the overall state of the home country's society.

Precisely, the outcome of the investigation in Romania and Bulgaria indicates that there is a positive interdependence between having relatives abroad and pro-social behavior of leftovers. This behavior manifests itself through charity and helping strangers, and is driven by positive experiences of friends and family, living in countries with advanced civil societies.

Examining the social impact of diaspora is of great importance as long as society shapes the state, which in turn projects policies of country's economic development. Yet, there are various ways for diaspora to enhance economic development and growth not only through society but directly.

As reported by Agunias and Newland [2012, p. 113 - 126], remittances are one of the pivotal areas through which diasporas contribute to the development of their home countries. Constituting an additional source of income, remittances improve the living standard, providing access to health care and education for people left behind. Saturated, healthy and educated individuals now have the opportunity to become skilled labor force, entrepreneurs and innovators. These positive developments lead to poverty reduction and investment growth.

Remittances undoubtedly provide a meaningful support for an individual or a family back home. These financial flows, however, are mainly dedicated to cover expenditures for a daily consumption. Thus, they may not be relied on as the sole drivers of fundamental and sustainable economic growth [Agunias and Newland].

Given the substantial volume of financial flows and other forms of aid, coming from diasporic communities, it is increasingly being scrutinized how to mobilize this potential in order to boost capital injection, promote trade and enhance commercial activity in the countries of origin.

Dhanami and Lee [2013] indicate that Caribbean diaspora mostly invest in startup companies in the world, prioritizing the Caribbean region. According to the authors, “access to finance is a critical piece of the stronger innovation ecosystem required for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and high - potential growth-oriented enterprises (HGEs) to prosper”[Dhanami and Lee, p.6]]. Given the integral role of SMEs in a country’s economic development, the direction of the Caribbean investment is noble. However, diaspora seems, by default, to have privileges as a foreign investor.

For instance, in the period of 1985 - 2000, diasporic contributions accounted nearly for 70 percent of China’s foreign direct investment [Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills, p. 13] . The authors find that diaspora had the advantage over non-Chinese entrepreneurs by knowing the local language, business practices, and regulations. This kind of expertise, as well as extensive networks and experience in doing business, helped them to overcome the market barriers, frustrating foreign investors the most.

While Hong Kong Chinese directly invested in China’s manufacturing, Indian and Israeli diaspora contributed to the prominent development of tech sectors in their countries of origin. Even though it is estimated that overseas Indians account only for 3 percent of foreign direct investment in India [Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills, p. 13 ], the success of country’s software industry has been mainly driven by the activity of distant expatriates.

Whereas, the lack of investment is not justified by the reluctance of Indians to supply it. In turn, it is implied by the specifics of software services. If destined for export, they are of high profitability and good cash flow. Hence, most of the ventures do not need to be funded with external capital. In turn, Indian diaspora “provided valuable links with foreign markets, helping Indian firms to absorb technical and managerial practices and establish contacts with foreign markets” [Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skill, p.61].

Neither has played diaspora an autonomous role when it comes to an influx of foreign direct investment in Israel. Although Jewish diaspora, especially in the USA, stands out for its famous generosity in terms of financial support and other forms of aid to Israel, it doesn't belong to the group of leading overseas investors.

Expatriate Jews, however, influenced a major boom in Israeli tech industry. According to Zuckerman [2001, as cited in Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills 2006 ], the growth of Israeli technology was stimulated by the commercialization of defense industry. The competences of Israeli military force in terms of communications network security and management appeared to be integral in the development and support of the Internet. “Many technology pioneers were veterans of the elite intelligence services” [Diaspora Networks and the International Migration of Skills 2006, p.62] In turn, research and development work in this sector was financed by the U.S. and Israeli governments. Whereas, external funds were obtained thanks to efficient lobbying, performed by the American Jews. Furthermore, Jewish diaspora contributed to attracting venture capital, acting as mentor and advisor for foreign investors.

Nevertheless, proper financing was not the only factor, driving Israeli transition from being purely agricultural to innovative high - tech economy. Namely, the success was largely attributable to human capital, which consisted not only of national engineers but also of highly - skilled Jews, coming from abroad. Around 1 million of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union entered Israel in 1989 [de Fontenay and Carmel 2000, p.9]. Many of them were of engineering and scientific backgrounds, which helped them to succeed in the ICT industry. All in all, at the beginning of 2000s, Israeli high-tech cluster

was assimilated to locations as Boston, Helsinki, London and Swedish Kista in terms of cluster effects' strength [de Fontenay and Carmel 2000, p.2 ].

### **What About Ukraine?**

Serving as a human capital, being a direct investor, setting a positive example for society or acting as a diplomat - diaspora has multiple faces. In either case, it proves to be one of the propelling forces for home country's economic development.

Accepting that diaspora drives the economic development of a nation-state, it is of essential importance to consider the countries, which are in priority need of such assistance. Ukraine, being one of the largest non-OECD diasporas seems to aptly fall into this category.

The most compelling evidence is that Ukraine's economy is still adapting to new realities, occurred in the aftermath of the Crimea's annexation, coupled with the outbreak of an armed conflict in the year of 2014 in Donbas - key industrial area, located in the Eastern part of Ukraine.

After country's loss of gas fields in the Black Sea shelf, touristic sector of Crimea, but also metallurgical, mining and chemical industries of Donbas, it has become apparent, that Ukraine stands on the verge of great changes. Furthermore, the breakdown of commercial relations with Russia - major export and import market of Ukraine, resulted in financial instability and destruction of the traditional model of raw materials industry [Foresight of Ukrainian Economy, 2015].

Under those circumstances, the experts have named the relevant strategy, which should be taken by the decision makers in the process of upcoming transition. According to them, the priority is to modify the investment policy. This is to say, the funds, mostly supplied by the external loans, should not be meant for financing low - technology and raw materials exports. In the light of increasing competition from China and India, such investments are unpromising. Growing supply of the low technology products on the world markets leads to lowering their prices, and the profits of manufacturers respectively.



In turn, Ukraine should establish itself in the areas, which will leverage its international competitiveness. And gaining the optimum niche in the international division of labor will be possible thanks to country's geographic situation and bountiful resources - both human and natural. These resources should trigger the development of Ukraine's high - tech business [Foresight of Ukrainian Economy, 2015].

Given the examples of other countries, this study aims at examining diaspora's role in Ukraine's economic development with particular focus on tech sector, which is considered to be the main driving force for achieving it.

### Methodology

In order to examine diasporic activity in Ukraine's technology sector, the qualitative method in the form of unstructured in - depth interview with the sole key informant has been selected. Whereas, the term *informant* is specifically applied instead of alternative *interviewee, respondent, research subject* or *participant*.

According to Edwards and Holland [2013], the term *informant* has been widely used in ethnographic methods, where key characters within an investigated group, culture or community, provided crucial information with regard to research setting. "Key informants have a formal or informal position that gives them specialist knowledge about the people and processes that are the subject of research"[Edwards and Holland 2013, p.31]. While the researcher considers to be an outsider, who desires to obtain relevant knowledge about the community.

Even though, one source of information may not be considered as credible and sufficient, there is no certain formula for choosing the relevant interview sample. In turn, the sample size is "completely dependent on the nature and design of the study, the aims and research questions and the underlying philosophical position adopted [Edwards and Holland, p.7].

In case of today's investigation, the informant both belongs to diaspora community and holds executive position in Ukraine's tech sector. Adherence to Ukrainian diaspora in

Canada and ability to interact with other members of the community on a daily basis enable the informant to provide an insight on the research issue. Furthermore, executive role in Ukraine's tech sector delivers him intimate knowledge about the developments, taking place in the industry. Therefore the given arguments justify the legitimacy of the individual, selected as the key informant.

Given the nature of the interview, which aims to explore informant's understanding of the subject and aspects of his experiences related to it, the *unstructured* form of the interview has been applied. The relevance of the method is that it enables an informant to talk from his own standpoint, referencing to familiar ideas and meanings. As long as flexibility is the key ingredient of unstructured method, it also allows "to develop unexpected themes and adjust the content of interviews and possibly the emphasis of the research as a result of issues that emerge in any interview" [Edwards and Holland, p.30].

Moreover, in order to elicit informant's *own story* relative to the research stance, a *biographical approach* has been employed. The questions, containing knowable portion of biographical data, intend to induce a non - interrupted narrative in the hope that it brings new facts to the table, which are relevant for the investigation. Information, obtained through narrative can help to shed light on the matters, which researcher could not otherwise understand or access.

All in all, the interview, consisting of questions with probes, was conducted via email. This form of such communication was selected due to geographical separation between the researcher and the informant. Apart of logistical advantages, which obviously save time and resources, the technique allows to obtain answers in the written form. Hence, they do not need to be transcribed.

The content of the interview with Bohdan Kupych, in which (**R**) stands for the researcher, while (**I**) for the informant, is presented below.

***The contribution of diaspora to Ukraine's economic development with particular focus on the country's tech sector.***

**Introduction**

**R:** Good evening Bohdan,

As far as you already know, as a Ph. D. candidate, I am currently examining the phenomenon of diaspora contribution to economic development of Ukraine, with a particular focus on the technology sector.

You are Canadian of Ukrainian descent, who was granted degree by the Canadian *alma mater* and started his career in that country. This, without a doubt, implies that you had plenty of business opportunities ahead of you, however, you chose Ukraine, as a destination for your professional culmination. Furthermore, thanks to existing enterprises, which were created by you, *inter alia*, Borshch Ventures, and Borshch Incubator - aiming at developing technology businesses, you contribute to transforming Ukraine from resource base to innovative industrial economy.

Not only you match relevant criteria as an interviewee, the features, indicated above, make you the sole key informant for my research.

Consequently, I would like you to enhance my understanding of the subject, answering the questions. Your explanation will contribute significantly to shedding light on this research issue.

Please note, that interview will take you approximately 30 min. The information , we exchange here, is strictly confidential and will be applied in my research only. Remember, that you can contact me in case if something is not clear for you. Of course, you are more than welcome to contact me also in the future in order to get the results and analysis of this interview.

R: 1. When you were still living in Canada, were you identifying yourself as an Ukrainian diaspora<sup>1</sup>, or rather Canadian of Ukrainian descent?

*Do you consider Canada is an hostcountry, while Ukraine is an homeland? Or vice versa?*

I:

R: 2. What was the main driving force for you to develop business in the tech sector in Ukraine?

*Was it purely economic factors, such as a market full of potential? Given that, Ukraine is ranked one of the most educated nations in the world with a solid engineering force.*

*Or was it rather patriotic zest for making things happen in the country of your origin?*

I:

R: 3. In your article *How to transform Ukraine's brain drain into brain gain*, you deploy that Canada's Ukrainian diaspora is of strong support to Ukraine's economic, social and political transformation. Is this support tangible in the tech sector?

*Can you perhaps give some particular evidence of this support e.g. a number of projects implemented, a size of investment in the sector? Generally, do you observe the progress has been made in Ukrainian tech sector in the recent years? To what extent Ukrainian diaspora, in the broad sense of the word, is responsible for this progress?*

I:

R: That's all from my side. Thanks again for your time and willingness to help!

### Data analysis

The first clear observation, that has to be highlighted from the interview, is that Ukrainian diaspora in Canada is quite assimilated with their host country. When asked the informant whether he considers himself Ukrainian or Canadian, he answered that he is

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<sup>1</sup> According to Constant and Zimmermann (2016), diaspora is a well-defined group of migrants or those with migrant background with a joined cultural identity and ongoing identification (active or dormant) with the country or culture of origin as they perceive it.

Ukrainian - Canadian. And the reason for this is that “a great deal of Canadians are from immigrant backgrounds, so being hyphenated Canadian is quite normal”.

However, assimilation with a host country doesn't always mean perceiving it as a homeland. In order to learn how it is in the informant's case, I asked, “Do you consider Canada as a host country, while Ukraine is a homeland? Or vice versa?”

Different than his parents, who migrated to Canada after the Second World War with no money and education, the informant had his personality and status totally shaped in the host country. He was granted degree by the Canadian *alma mater* and started his career there. Hence, it is not surprising that the informant answered, that he considers Canada as a home country. With this in mind, it may be concluded that those representatives of diaspora, already born and raised in the host country, are more bound to it than to a country of origin.

This attachment, however, doesn't prevent diaspora from cultivating its original culture. In fact, participation in Ukrainian community organisations and learning the language, were among the key factors, which determined informant's decision to set up business in Ukraine. Specifically, when asked “What was the main driving force for you to develop business in the tech sector in Ukraine?”, the informant replied that being raised in Ukrainian community and learning things about the country, he got to know that due to “Ukraine's legacy of R&D and a base for technology for all of the USSR, there were a lot of smart people to work with”. Another objectives, which influenced informant's decision, included desire to take his career into next level and ability to “develop a business from scratch in a whole new developing country”.

Developing business activity of informant's former employer, Digital Equipment Corporation - second largest IT company in the world, was possible thanks to termination of COCOM<sup>2</sup> rules. Originally it was to be a branch of the office in Moscow, however with the informant's encouragement it became apparent that “Ukraine as a country as large as France, needed its own management”.

To assess the role of diaspora on the path of Ukraine's transformation, I asked the informant, “you deploy that Canada's Ukrainian diaspora is of strong support to Ukraine's

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<sup>2</sup> Regulations which put embargo on export of high - tech to USSR during the Cold War.

economic, social and political transformation. Is this support tangible in the tech sector?” The informant replied that Ukraine has always been and continues to be supported by the diaspora in Canada, which is broad and influential. According to the informant, Ukrainian diaspora in Canada has been engaged in a range of development projects over the past 25 years. Those programs included internships, military and law enforcement trainings, regional development programs, support for small and medium enterprises and universities.

When it comes to the developments in tech sector, the informant himself is a bright example. He gave up a stable position in the host country in order to develop the company’s activity in Ukraine, which resulted in job creation and transfer of knowledge. And yet after establishing the business, he stayed in Ukraine in order to keep the sector growing through collaborating with universities and creating incubators for technology ventures.

Furthermore, aside of lobbying and financial assistance, provided by diaspora, Ukraine can also use experience of countries like Canada, USA, Israel, Ireland and Poland in developing its own tech industry. According to the informant, “Ukraine can learn from some of the best examples of economies that have recognised that technology will continue moving forward irrespective of what any one country does”.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

There are many definitions of the term *diaspora*. This paper reviewed the definitions describing its essential features. To summarize, diaspora is always about the group of people, living in a foreign country, not the individual immigrants - this is also the main quality, which distinguishes diaspora from migration. Furthermore, diaspora can exist even if a nation - state no longer does. The examples of this group include the Tibetans, Kurds and Palestinians. Another features that unify diaspora members are: common sense of responsibility for a homeland, identification with it and desire to return eventually.

Since diaspora cares for well - being of the home country, it contributes, in a variety of different ways, to its socio - economic development. The supporting activities range from

sending remittances to transferring the knowledge and lobbying home country's interests. The countries, whose economic development was significantly driven by their diaspora, are, *inter alia*, India, China and Israel.

Given there is historical evidence of diaspora's role in a prominent development of particular countries, the aim of this study was to examine if it occurs in Ukraine - a country with one of the largest diasporas in the world. Accepting that reorientation to high - tech business is the only way for Ukraine to guarantee development and progress, the main emphasis was put on diasporic contribution to the advancement of country's tech sector.

For this, the interview with sole key informant has been conducted. Information, obtained in the course of the interview, helped to shed light on the matters, which researcher could not have otherwise understood or accessed. Hence, the best way to start exploring this subject was to directly communicate with the individual, having intimate knowledge about the subject.

Another advantage of the method selected was the ability to learn the motives of diasporic undertakings, which can be different from the objectives of non - Ukrainian entrepreneurs. Explicitly, the motives of diaspora can be driven by the responsibility for prosperity of a home country or desire to return.

All in all, the analysis of the data collected indicates that there is a sincere need for Ukraine to become successful. Even if not being born and raised in Ukraine, diaspora members cultivate the culture and language, which helps them to get to know their country of origin. Consequently, when setting up a business or mentoring a project in Ukraine, they have way more privileges than non - Ukrainian entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, it was confirmed that Ukraine has an important tools to develop its high - tech sector - technology base, inherited after the USSR, and skilled engineers. Hence, if entering Ukrainian market due to various reasons - career growth, patriotic deed or gaining experience, it is a win - win situation for both sides.

To sum up, in the course of the study, it was proved that diaspora's role in economic development of Ukraine is present in many dimensions, including tech sector. The expertise and the incentive diaspora can bring to its home country is for their mutual benefit.

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