Social Remittances from the Professional Diaspora: The Issue of Home-Country Receptivity

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This article deals with the issue of home-country receptivity towards social remittances from the professional diaspora. Social remittances from the highly skilled depend on a favourable context for knowledge and skills transfer in their home countries, a context that could be summarised by the term 'country receptivity'. This article is based on the case of Lithuania. The data comes from a series of semi-structured interviews with members of the skilled diaspora and representatives of institutions that are involved in programmes targeted at the diaspora. The analysis reveals several groups of obstacles to successful knowledge and skills transfer that may be understood as issues of country receptivity: mistrust of government by diaspora members, expressed as a belief that it is not interested in results and thus involvement of the diaspora, but rather in pursuing particular political objectives; lack of openness towards other experiences (unwillingness of institutions at different levels and in various fields to open up to new opinions, approaches and experiences brought by Lithuanians from abroad); bureaucratic and institutional impediments (inability of institutions to adapt their procedures in the interests of co-operation; slowness and ineffectiveness when dealing with requests or reacting to initiatives from the diaspora); and a perceived negative opinion (unwelcoming attitude) in society towards Lithuanians from abroad. The interviews also provide some tentative evidence of a 'feedback loop', through which the involvement of the diaspora causes changes in the home-country institutions. In the discussion part of the article, possible causes and implications of these obstacles are considered.

Keywords: professional diaspora; diaspora option; social remittances; knowledge transfer; home-country receptivity

Introduction

In 2012, Milda Dargužaitė became the director of Invest in Lithuania, the Lithuanian investment promotion agency. Dargužaitė spent seventeen years in the USA, where she made a career in banking, and came back to Lithuania in 2011 at the invitation of the then Prime Minister, conservative leader Andrius Kubilius. In 2014, she resigned from this position and published an open address entitled 'Work or Tilting at Windmills?', which indicated her disagreements with the government (by then, a Social Democratic government headed by Andrius Butkevičius) and various bureaucratic impediments to the work of her institution (*Delfi* 2014). In her

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media interview, she also spoke of what she saw as lack of appreciation and said that although this case is not an indication for other Lithuanians from abroad not to come back to work in Lithuania, it would be advisable first to come for a short time in order 'to learn how everything works here' (*Žinių radijas* 2014).

Although there are admittedly two sides to the argument (critics of Dargužaitė blamed her for 'capriciousness' and other character traits, see e.g. Jačauskas 2014), the story can be, and is, as we will see later, regarded as a sign of the problematic relationship between Lithuania and its professional diaspora. On the one hand, the goal of involving the diaspora is declared and programmes for its involvement exist; on the other hand, the process of collaboration is not always smooth and leaves neither side happy.

A skilled diaspora can have various benefits for the development of the homeland: it can help to increase the flow of trade and investment into the country; it can promote the country's foreign policy goals; it can promote cultural relations between countries, and so on. Social remittances are one aspect of the diaspora's contribution, and in the case of the skilled diaspora they come in the form of knowledge and skills transfer. However, as the above story shows, social remittances from the highly skilled depend on a favourable context for knowledge and skills transfer in their home countries, which can be summarised by the term 'country receptivity', explained in more detail in the next section. This article deals with the issue of homeland receptivity, analysed through the obstacles encountered by nationals abroad when dealing with the home-country institutions.

The article continues previous research on diaspora options based on the mobilisation of diaspora resources and their associated programmes in the country of origin (Meyer, Brown 1999). While diaspora networks and their potential and actual benefits for the home country have been widely analysed, relatively less attention has been devoted to the conditions in the home country that influence how effectively these potential benefits are exploited. Thus the article aims to direct research interest towards country receptivity with a focus on the 'soft' obstacles to knowledge transfer which arise when formal opportunities and policies for knowledge transfer are there, but diaspora members nevertheless face obstacles related to human factors.

The author of the concept of social remittances, Peggy Levitt, wrote that 'to study how social remittances travel and to evaluate their impact, researchers have to look in one place at one point in time' (Levitt, Lamba-Nieves 2010: 3). This article looks at the case of Lithuania, where the large diaspora (relative to the general population size) includes a significant proportion of highly skilled people, and where there is a formal government programme and various initiatives for diaspora involvement. The study, based on exploratory qualitative research methods, provides examples of the lack of country receptivity in a particular context and aims to identify obstacles/issues not mentioned elsewhere. The data come mainly from a series of semi-structured interviews with members of the skilled diaspora and representatives of state institutions that are involved in programmes targeted at the diaspora. The article concentrates on the skilled or professional diaspora, that is, highly skilled professionals able to contribute to the development of their home country in terms of knowledge and skills transfer through involvement in various activities and networks.

The article reviews previous research literature on home-country receptivity before presenting the Lithuanian context of emigration and diaspora involvement and moving on to analyse qualitative data on obstacles to the diaspora's collaboration with Lithuania. The discussion section identifies possible reasons for and implications of these obstacles.

Receptivity of the home country

For the last few decades, the emphasis of emigration policy in many countries has shifted from the losses due to emigration towards possible gains from it. This is the so-called 'diaspora option' (as opposed to the 'return option'), which is based on the idea that the expatriate skilled population may be considered a potential asset

for a country and can be utilised without depending on the return of that part of the population to live in the country of origin (Meyer and Brown 1999). Diaspora is understood here in the modern sense, as the migrant community of all those living outside their home country, including those who have left only temporarily, and who identify and remain engaged with their country of origin (Newland 2010b: 3).

The potential benefits from the diaspora are manifold. They include not only such tangible benefits as financial remittances, investments in business, export flows and contributions to charity, but also social remittances in the form of ideas, values, behaviours or practices, identities, social capital and other non-tangible resources that contribute to the development of the home country (Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010).

In the case of the professional diaspora, knowledge and skills transfer as a type of social remittance come under Levitt's definition of ideas and behaviours and are analysed in various other studies (e.g. Hanifi 2006; Mata-Codesal 2013; Siar 2014). This includes, but is not limited to, the transfer of knowledge and skills in science and technology, business and trade, economics, culture and the arts. Activities by which knowledge transfer is carried out may be informal or formal, and may include training, informal advisory activities, research projects, expert consulting, setting up business ventures or investing in the home country (Siar 2014).

In addition to individual social remittances, there are also collective social remittances that 'circulate and are harnessed in collective organisational settings' (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010: 2) and change the ways organisations function in terms of ideas about organisational management, capacity building, etc. (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010). These are also relevant in the case of the professional diaspora. For example, Kuznetsov (2008), although he does not use the concept of social remittances or collective remittances, hypothesises a 'virtuous cycle', whereby a professional diaspora's members, engaging in knowledge-transfer activities with institutions in their home countries, contribute to the transformation of 'bad' institutions situated there (Kuznetsov 2008).

While research literature provides a great deal of evidence on the benefits of knowledge and skills transfer from the diaspora, the internal dynamics of diaspora networks that form the basis for its contributions, and diaspora policies around the world (for wider reviews, see Ionescu 2006; Kuznetsov 2006; Meyer and Wattiaux 2006; Wescott and Brinkerhoff 2006; Faist 2008; Newland 2010a; Newland and Tanaka 2010, Kuznetsov 2013; Elo 2014; etc.), within this enthusiastic 'mantra' (Kapur 2004) less attention has been devoted to the difficulties that arise in the process of the diaspora's involvement, particularly at the micro level, with person-to-person interaction. As has been noted, for the diaspora to be involved in activities with the home country requires not only the ability to mobilise and the motivation to contribute, but also certain conditions connected to the home country (Wescott 2006). Often these conditions are conceptualised as 'opportunity structures', or 'policies and initiatives for diaspora's involvement that exist in the home country, possibilities for developing skills and knowledge, and availability of intermediary organisations' (Wescott 2006: 6).

Brinkerhoff (2006: 19) claims that favourable conditions for transferring diaspora knowledge include government policies and society in the country of origin: 1) government policies that enable diaspora economic opportunities; reward and publicise diaspora knowledge contributions; facilitate information exchange; and legitimate knowledge transfer/exchange projects; 2) a homeland society that welcomes diaspora contributions, perceiving them as legitimate and valuable; does not criticise diaspora members for not returning; and confers prestige on participating diaspora members. As she mentions, these two groups of factors are mutually supportive: the homeland government policy can promote favourable attitudes in society, while society can influence government policies.

Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome (2013), in their analysis of the factors conducive to diaspora involvement in the economy of the developing homeland, define similar factors and summarise them under the label of 'receptivity of the home country's government'. Referring to previous studies, they list several factors that

constitute the receptivity of a government: 'general attitude of government leaders toward diaspora members, diaspora investment programmes, government agencies for diaspora issues, simplifying and reducing administrative formalities related to starting a business, tackling usual hassles, such as red tape, customs delays and bribery, country image, effectiveness of judicial system, and infrastructures' (Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome 2013: 52–53). In a survey on the Egyptian diaspora's contribution, the main obstacle that was identified was bureaucracy in state institutions and lack of transparency (Mehrez and Hamdy 2010: 256). Brzozowski, Cucculelli and Surdej (2014) include, among other socio-economic characteristics of the home country that influence collaborative relationships, the level of corruption. In the Armenian case, obstacles to diaspora involvement include not only opportunity structures (the lack of clear priorities and wide-ranging programmes), but also the atmosphere of disregard and mistrust between diaspora and homeland expressed in the form of patronising and pretentious attitudes, prejudices and misunderstandings, and the absence of the rule of law, which creates mistrust (Manaseryan 2004: 9–10). Kuznetsov (2008) also claims that the success of diaspora initiatives depends on the quality of the home-country institutions that sustain them. He says that this factor may be even more critical than some other apparently important factors: 'willingness of domestic economies to reform, to open up their economies is even more important than the size of the diasporas. (…) Diasporas could be massive, rich, and entrepreneurial and have a lot of enthusiasm to get involved, yet it is home country organisations which invariably become binding constraints' (Kuznetsov 2008: 276).

Obstacles to knowledge and skills transfer have similarly been analysed in the context of return migration. Many studies have focused on the return migration of Central and Eastern Europeans, for example, Slovak doctors (Williams and Baláž 2008), and Polish (Klagge and Klein-Hitpaß 2007, 2010), Serbian (Jackson 2012) and Georgian (among other) (Kuschminder, Sturge and Ragab 2014) highly skilled returnees. These studies demonstrate that, like diaspora contributions, knowledge transfer from returnees is possible and that high-skilled return migration can support knowledge-based development, but it depends on the institutional context. The studies identify some of the obstacles already mentioned, such as extensive bureaucracy (Klagge and Klein-Hitpaß 2007; Kuschminder et al. 2014) and corruption (Kuschminder et al. 2014). At a more specific workplace level, studies on returnees mention obstacles to knowledge and skills transfer such as the lack of recognition of returnees' knowledge, lack of trust between returnees and colleagues (Jackson 2012), lack of organisational openness to external knowledge (Williams and Baláž 2008; Oddou, Szkudlarek, Osland, Deller, Blakeney and Furuya 2013) and colleagues' lack of experience and capabilities (Kuschminder et al. 2014). Several of these studies confirm the positive relationship of knowledge transfer with colleagues' previous international experience (Jackson 2012; Oddou et al. 2013) and link the obstacles to knowledge transfer to the relatively young age of returnees, which is regarded with suspicion in relation to proposed changes (Williams and Baláž 2008; Jackson 2012).

Thus the supportive context for knowledge transfer comprises more than 'opportunity structures' understood strictly in the sense of available policies and initiatives; it also includes other factors such as quality of institutions and bureaucracy, relationships of trust, attitudes towards and acts of appreciation of the diaspora on the part of government, and welcoming attitudes towards diaspora contributions in wider society. In this article, the wider concept of 'home-country receptivity' will be used as it corresponds more accurately with the subject of the present study. Although not well conceptualised in literature, it can be defined as the willingness and the ability of a country to accept and assimilate knowledge and skills contributions from its diaspora. For the purposes of the empirical study presented here it is defined more precisely as the absence of 'soft' obstacles to knowledge and skills transfer from the diaspora, that is, the absence of obstacles that arise despite the existence of formal programmes and material resources for diaspora involvement. In the interviews, diaspora involvement in knowledge and skills transfer was discussed in terms of 'collaboration' with institutions in the home country, so the term 'collaboration' will also be used in the analysis.

The context: diaspora policy in Lithuania

Lithuania faces one of the highest emigration rates in the EU. While the exact numbers are not available due to the large scale of unregistered emigration (cf. Thaut 2009), it is estimated that during the period since independence (1990–2014), as many as 825 000 people have left the country. With immigration estimated at 198 000 (mostly returning Lithuanian citizens), Lithuania has experienced net migration of 627 000 people since 1990 (European Migration Network 2015), or 17 per cent of the 3.69 million inhabitants it had in 1989. A significant proportion of these emigrants were skilled, educated, younger people (Thaut 2009; Sipavičienė and Stankūnienė 2011).

In the first decade after independence, the emphasis of emigration policy was on relationships with Lithuanians from earlier waves of emigration, as well as support for the teaching of Lithuanian and Lithuanian cultural activities for ethnic Lithuanians in other, mostly neighbouring, countries (Bagdonavičienė 2012). With the rising numbers of 'new' emigrants, fuelled by EU membership in 2004 (cf. Thaut 2009; Sipavičienė and Stankūnienė 2011), public attention and policy discourse shifted to economic emigration and the encouragement of return migration to the country. However, the economic crisis of 2008 again caused the focus of emigration policy to shift, with renewed emphasis on the need to maintain the Lithuanian identity of Lithuanians living abroad and involve them into the life of the country, without necessarily bringing them back; in other words, maintaining the diaspora's links with the country and using its potential for the country's development (Bagdonavičienė 2012). The change of language (from the *Strategy for Regulation of Economic Migration* in 2007 to the *Global Lithuania Programme* in 2011) was symptomatic of the shift. Thus the development of emigration discourse was a concentrated reflection of the development of policy approaches to emigration observed in many other countries (cf. Faist 2008).

Recent years have seen the start of some major initiatives in the task of involving the diaspora. In 2011, under the previous government (2008–2012), the *Global Lithuania Programme* was established, setting out guidelines for involving the diaspora in the life of the country. The programme has no dedicated budget and is financed by individual ministries or projects financed from EU structural funds. Both in connection with the programme and as separate initiatives, several important programmes and projects were started, which have already proved successful. Two very important examples focused on the skilled diaspora are the Invest in Lithuania and Enterprise Lithuania projects. Since 2012, Invest in Lithuania (an investment promotion agency) has implemented a programme called *Create for Lithuania* (at the end of 2015, the funding of the programme for 2016–2019 was confirmed but reduced by half). The programme enables young Lithuanian professionals from abroad to come to Lithuanian state institutions to work on a project basis to solve particular inter-ministerial problems, such as improving conditions for companies to employ specialists from third countries, or the development of a deposit-return system for disposable beverage containers. Since 2013, Enterprise Lithuania (an agency that, among other tasks, works to help Lithuanian companies to penetrate foreign markets) implements the Business Advisors programme, where Lithuanians from abroad act as advisers for Lithuanian companies, particularly those entering foreign markets. There are other programmes addressing the diaspora more widely.

The programmes described are the responsibility of organisations affiliated to state institutions. Non-governmental organisations and diaspora networks also run numerous projects and activities: for example, the Global Lithuanian Leaders network, run by a non-governmental organisation, connects over 700 highly successful and experienced Lithuanian professionals from all over the world and is highly visible in diaspora discourse and related activities. Global Lithuanian Leaders is the initiator (together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Invest in Lithuania and a private company, TEO LT) of the Global Lithuania Awards which are

presented annually to international Lithuanians and 'friends of Lithuania' who contribute to the global development and promotion of the country. All these activities demonstrate the strong motivation of diaspora members to engage in the development of Lithuania and of the government to use this potential, and the existence of at least some opportunity structures for diaspora engagement.

Methods and data

This article deals with home-country receptivity, understood as defined above, and focuses on the obstacles that Lithuanians living abroad face when they engage in various knowledge-transfer activities, that is, in collaboration with people and institutions in Lithuania. It is a subjective look at the receptivity of the home country: rather than analysing diaspora policy it focuses on how the receptivity is perceived by members of the diaspora themselves. The analysis is therefore based on a constructivist approach: it is assumed that the obstacles they perceive are real, since these will reduce their motivation to participate in activities with Lithuania. On the other hand, most of the respondents who were interviewed have experience of participating in various projects with Lithuanian institutions or have professional relationships with Lithuania. Therefore the obstacles they mention might be overgeneralised, but are nevertheless based on real experience.

The study discusses obstacles that members of the diaspora face in collaboration with several types of institution, both state and academic. When the receptivity of the home country is discussed in the literature, the role of state institutions is emphasised; Kuznetsov (2008) writes about institutions or organisations without explicitly defining what kind of institutions or organisations are relevant. However, in the present study, respondents often indicated obstacles that they face when dealing with academic institutions, and business organisations were also mentioned. Thus it is assumed that organisations from all fields are relevant and they are all included in the analysis.

The study uses an exploratory approach based on qualitative data. The main body of data was 30 semi-structured interviews with members of the skilled diaspora (Lithuanians abroad working in business or academia, both representatives of diaspora organisations or networks and individual professionals – see Table 1 for their characteristics) and eight representatives of institutions involved in the *Global Lithuania Programme*. Most interviews were conducted in 2014 within the framework of a research project dedicated to the study of Lithuanian diaspora networks; most interviewees were visited by researchers in their countries of residence (UK, Ireland, USA), while a few were interviewed on visits to Lithuania or on Skype. Three representatives of diaspora organisations who were interviewed (themselves return migrants) are currently living in Lithuania. Some of the interviews were conducted in 2012 for another study (Gudelis, Gečienė and Jakulevičienė 2012) and are used here with the permission of the authors.

A supplementary data source used in the study includes comments collected in an anonymous survey of diaspora members conducted within the same project. In the survey, 512 Lithuanian professionals living abroad were asked to evaluate the importance of factors that discourage them from being more involved with Lithuania. In addition to evaluating the listed options, they could specify other factors in their own words. In these comments, many respondents mentioned specific obstacles that can be classified as home-country receptivity issues and thus are relevant for the present study. Only 24 respondents provided additional comments in the text field of the question, and these are used here as an additional source of data.

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Number
Sex	
Female	15
Male	15
Age	
21–30	7
31–40	8
41–50	8
51–60	3
61–70	1
71–80	3
Interviewed as	
Individual professional	16
Representative of a diaspora organisation	14
Professional field	
Science, research	11
Business	10
Arts	4
Other	5
Country	
USA	10
UK	7
Lithuania	3
Other	10

In the semi-structured interviews, the members of the diaspora were asked about obstacles and difficulties they face in their professional relations with Lithuania. The interviews with representatives of institutions employed a similar approach, addressing different aspects of inclusion of the diaspora in the life of the country, including questions about obstacles to collaboration. Among the state institutions that form part of the *Global Lithuania Programme*, the most useful and interesting interviews were those with agencies under the Ministry of the Economy (Enterprise Lithuania, Invest in Lithuania) that have specific programmes for diaspora inclusion and also encounter obstacles while dealing with other state institutions. Other interviews with state institutions were used to assess their attitudes towards collaboration with Lithuanians from abroad and awareness of possible obstacles. In the text, quotations from interviews are italicised.

Obstacles to collaboration with the home country

Analysis of the interviews yielded several groups of obstacles to successful knowledge and skills transfer that may be explained as issues of home-country receptivity: diaspora members' general mistrust of government; the lack of openness towards different approaches and experiences; bureaucratic rigidity and inefficiency; and a perceived negative attitude to emigration in society. These are discussed in further detail.

'The government itself is the problem': the issue of trust

The interviews show that general mistrust of the Lithuanian government hinders participation in government programmes for the diaspora; in the words of one interviewee, the obstacle to participation *is, in principle, mistrust of the members of the Lithuanian government*. One respondent, when asked if the government could be the initiator of programmes to involve the diaspora, replied that *the government itself is the problem*, because mistrust of it and other problems of public governance drives people out of Lithuania: *I would wish for less corruption and for Lithuania to become a more Western-like country with more trust in government* (21–30, UK, employed in business, coordinator of a collaboration programme). Although some respondents were positive about the government's efforts to involve the diaspora, the predominant attitude in the interviews was critical, even from those who acknowledged some progress in this respect.

If we define trust in institutions as the belief that they act in the public interest, the professionals interviewed do not believe that Lithuanian institutions do. One of the obstacles to the use of diaspora potential identified in the interviews is the inability of the government to distance itself from political interests, with the result that decisions, e.g. on public appointments or allocation of resources, are made not on the merits of the qualifications of the specialists or in pursuit of national goals, but are based on particular political interests. Respondents were positive about the efforts of the previous government to attract investment to Lithuania *via* diaspora connections (the successful cases of Barclays and Western Union were mentioned). The respondents considered that those efforts were successful because, in respect of certain appointments, priority was given to people's qualifications and expertise rather than to their political affiliations or connections: *The best the government can do... is to delegate the work to the experts in that field who perhaps hold different political opinions but are interested in doing the job in the best possible way* (21–30, UK, business consultant).

In this context, the case of Milda Dargužaitė, described at the beginning of the article, was mentioned as a negative example. Some of the respondents acknowledged the possibility of different interpretations (*it's a different story, how she was acting herself*) but nevertheless treated the case essentially negatively as the quintessence of the inability of state institutions to involve the diaspora and appreciate its contribution: *How can you convince diaspora to come back, if you act like this?* (31–40, UK, representative of a diaspora organisation). In the words of the respondent, it demonstrates a breach of the principle of meritocracy that harms relationships with the diaspora.

The lack of this principle is also exemplified by the inability of state institutions to respond to diaspora requests (e.g., about possible support for activities of diaspora organisations or a search for contacts for particular activities) unless they come through personal connections or from a person with formal status, as noted by one of the respondents:

> *The main problem with the institutions is the Lithuanian mentality. In Lithuania, there is a tendency towards elitism. If I am some kind of a boss, then there is contact with me, if I am of lower status, then basically I don't get any attention. (...) When they say they build relationships with emigrants, they mean they have contacts with the leader of the Lithuanian World Community, and that's good, but do they communicate directly with people? (...) Official requests are met very coldly and you have to look for personal connections in order to pursue your interests* (41–50, Ireland, representative of a diaspora organisation).

'They come here and teach us how to live': lack of openness to other experiences

In the interviews one can see a clear pattern: the obstacles that are mentioned most often are those connected with mentality, thinking and culture, and not with financial or other material resources; in other words, 'soft'

obstacles. One frequently mentioned issue is the closed nature of Lithuanian institutions (both state and academic), meaning their unwillingness or inability to show interest in and to accept different experiences and opinions (in the words of one respondent, *to learn from someone else's mistakes*). The following passage, where the respondent talks about the need to change thinking and open up to the world, could be used as an illustration:

First of all, the thinking must change. (...) We have to stop thinking that Lithuanian experience is the best in the world. Lithuanian experience is equally as good as Irish, or English, but it is not the only possible one. We have to stop thinking, for example, that a student who has studied in the same university from undergraduate to doctorate is the ideal student. Usually, it's good to change several times. In Lithuania, this is not easily accepted. When you say that the student was there and there, then they say: oh, it's clear, he was running around and he is not serious. But he has more experience, which is valuable. This is difficult. (...) The first change we must make – to get out of our heads that everything Lithuanian is the best (41–50, Ireland, representative of a diaspora organisation).

Thus, in the opinion of those abroad, Lithuanians in Lithuania are not interested in their experience. Obstacles to cooperation mentioned in the survey by respondents included: *lack of openness*, *provincialism*, *unwillingness to include others*, *unfriendliness*, etc. In the opinion of one respondent, this attitude – *they come here and teach us how to live* – is discouraging international Lithuanians of various generations whom he knows. The respondent thinks that recently this attitude has become less prevalent, but is far from extinct. Thus *you have to be more open and not think that we come to take something away from you*. This is contrasted with the example of Estonian academia, *where many more Estonians from abroad are employed or have come back, because the Estonian academic world is much more open to the Western academic world* (41–50, Canada, researcher).

Another respondent, an expert in social sciences working abroad, said he did not have the feeling that his expertise or connections would be used. A wider problem, he explained, is that state institutions are not interested in consultations with outside experts (the respondent had previously said that he wanted to register as a consultant during the 2013 Lithuanian presidency of the Council of the EU, but could not figure out how to do that):

What I saw while working here in the agency is that other countries are much more able to use the EU, that is, those contacts that they get because of the EU. (...) I see as an obstacle the fact that consultation mechanisms in Lithuania are not developed. All consultations that the Lithuanian government has are often simulated. They take place only because it's done like this elsewhere and because EU financing requires consultations with interest groups. But it is often just an imitation of consultations (41–50, Ireland, researcher).

In the respondent's opinion, experts of various nationalities could be employed as outside consultants, but Lithuanians from abroad would have an advantage, because they could read documents in Lithuanian and in many cases would be better acquainted with the Lithuanian context.

A respondent from Invest Lithuania recounted the difficulties that the agency encountered during the implementation of one of their projects – *Create for Lithuania* – in which young professionals from abroad take up short-term projects to solve a specific problem. The agency met with strong opposition on the part of the state institutions that had to employ the programme's participants. With their clear functional boundaries, the institutions were unaccustomed to the project-based and inter-institutional nature of the work:

I remember the first time I was presenting this programme to the ministries and explaining how everything was going to work, and they said: 'What?! Projects?! What projects?! A project is something that is financed by EU and lasts five years. We are not project institutions, we are functional organisations, and my job is to supervise new drafts of certain laws, or fill in certain documents'. And we, with Create for Lithuania*, we came with, let's call it a business approach, that there is a problem and it doesn't matter that it is related to the spheres of both the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Security and Labour and some other ministry. You have to solve that problem in a complex way. Because if you just scrape away at one institution, nothing changes. This was extremely hard to accomplish* (21–30, representative of Invest Lithuania).

The respondent affirmed that later the situation started changing and many state institutions acknowledged, at least at senior leadership level, the advantages of the programme and the value created by the young professionals – although not in all cases, since there are still some institutions that are not able to propose projects suitable for the programme in the sense of being sufficiently specific and ambitious. However, as the respondent said, there are problems at the lower level, with young professionals facing negative attitudes from other (older) officials and obstacles in their daily work.

Some scepticism towards the experience of Lithuanians from abroad is felt even among businesses, although probably less so than in other areas. According to the Enterprise Lithuania representative, for some companies the Lithuanian consultant from abroad initially seemed like a *waste of time*, but eventually most of the companies involved in the programme appreciated the benefits of this kind of collaboration. In the present study, no other obstacles to collaboration with companies were mentioned (the sample did not include any other respondents working in businesses). However, as we saw in the literature review, this does not rule out the possibility that businesses are not entirely open to contributions from the diaspora. Žvalionytė's (2015) research has shown that Lithuanians who have come back to live in Lithuania don't feel that their experience is being appreciated and are even aware of negative attitudes towards them; for employers, too, the experience of living and working abroad does not always constitute an advantage. Although the results of this study cannot be automatically applied to cases of collaborating without returning to live in the country, they do indicate that the business sector is also capable of displaying something of a closed attitude towards the contributions of the diaspora.

Reflecting on the possible reasons for these kinds of attitude, some respondents mentioned envy, competition, negative attitudes in the culture towards young people (since the professionals from abroad tend to be young), and even fear of losing their job. Research literature shows very similar explanations from other countries (cf. Williams and Baláž 2008; Jackson 2012). This is echoed by an observation by one of the respondents that the relationship between diaspora and country of origin should be an equal one, making it the most productive for collaboration:

The relationship must be equal, then you can collaborate and learn something. Most people don't get that. If you are not my chief, why would I listen to your orders? But perhaps it's not a command I'm giving you, it's advice. Lithuanians listen to advice only when it comes from their chiefs. I stereotype here a little… (41–50, Ireland, representative of a diaspora organisation).

On the other hand, in some cases the opportunities offered by Lithuanians from abroad might fail to be appreciated because of their newness, lack of familiarity and the absence of particular traditions; thus they only become accepted gradually over time and against the background of a continuing publicity campaign. For example, the coordinator of a project aimed at Lithuanian students, *LT Big Brother*, which provides students

with a Lithuanian mentor from abroad for support on personal development, career planning and employment issues, stated that one of the obstacles to implementing the project was insufficient motivation on the part of the students. It was not easy to attract students and to keep them motivated, since they did not entirely understand what a mentor was and what one could expect from them. However, positive development has been achieved by simply educating the students about the project idea and continually promoting it.

'Any request disappears like in a black hole': bureaucratic rigidity and inefficiency

Institutional rigidity and inefficiency was a problem frequently mentioned in the interviews and exemplified by many stories. By rigidity, we mean the inability of institutions to adjust their procedures when required in the interests of more effective collaboration with Lithuanians from abroad, or for any collaboration to happen at all. Inefficiency in this case refers to their inability to cope with tasks in an acceptable manner and at an acceptable speed.

Bureaucratic systems in institutions cannot foresee all possible circumstances, and neither can they make exceptions in specific situations or cases in the process of dealing with the diaspora. Lithuanians from abroad may need exceptions to be made because of differences in the legal, academic or other systems in different countries and their more complicated life stories. Respondents mentioned examples from collaboration with academic institutions. University teachers experience difficulties with the strict structure of lecture cycles (*There is no model, which would allow for one or two lectures from an outside lecturer*; 21–30, UK, scientist), with the lack of flexible forms of employment (*In America they can be a visiting professor, agent… there is nothing like this in Lithuania. If I want to be a part of the faculty, I have to be full time with a permanent salary and then of course I have to be at the university for a certain time*; 41–50, USA, scientist), and even differences in forms of lecturing and requirements for students (*When I teach at Vilnius University, for example, a part of my requirements is that students come to every lecture. I am told that I cannot require that. I say that I can, because my teaching is based on discussions*; 41–50, USA, scientist).

The same scientist told a story not directly connected to any collaborative activities, but nevertheless symptomatic. He said that in the end he did not vote in parliamentary elections, because he could not fill in the forms he got from the Lithuanian embassy. After the first attempt to submit the documents, he was told there were too many mistakes, and decided not to continue with the forms:

> *Although I intended to register this time, I didn't finish it, because there are problems with those forms, in the sense that they are not suitable for Lithuanian citizens who were born in America. They ask 'how many years ago did you arrive in America?' I don't know how to answer this question, if I was born there. My life doesn't fit into their forms* (41–50, USA, scientist).

Another problem experienced when dealing with state institutions is inefficiency, with replies to requests taking too long or not being received at all: *I often hear a complaint that we have contacted [an institution] and we haven't received the answer* (41–50, representative of the Foreign Ministry).

At project level, inefficiency is experienced as differing views on aspects of work culture: project management, meeting deadlines, etc. For example, several respondents from academia complained about their negative experience of collaborating with scientists and researchers from Lithuania. At the start, the Lithuanians show a great deal of enthusiasm for joint projects, but then the partners are faced with delays and uncompleted tasks, unacceptable for academics from other countries or even impossible to reconcile with their other responsibilities:

So the first steps are very enthusiastic, but when we come to the stage when we have to talk about the important stuff and implementation of things, it gets a bit stuck. (...) When we have already passed that first step where there is an interest in the project and we are setting our goals, when we come to the implementation of those goals, everything shatters: they either don't reply quickly to emails or they say 'oh, this didn't work out, perhaps we can postpone it until next week'. But in America it doesn't work like that: if you have a deal, you have to work for it. And many things are organised at least a semester beforehand and not one or two weeks. So there is a lack of such understanding (21–30, USA, researcher).

Another respondent addressed this problem when talking about the role of state institutions in promoting diaspora projects. In her opinion, state institutions should not take part in the management of these projects, and she explained this in terms of *differing views on how it should be done* (21–30, UK, employed in business, coordinator of a collaboration programme). As she explained, when one has experience of working abroad in big corporations, one acquires a *different* understanding of project management and the skills required, and therefore an attempt at joint management of a project could even result in a conflict. In the comments in the survey, some respondents also indicated *lack of competences* as an obstacle to collaboration with Lithuanian institutions.

Respondents also mentioned other specific problems with institutions that add to their rigidity and inefficiency, such as dispersion of functions and lack of coordination between different institutions:

When I talk with representatives of ministries, I see a huge scattering and pursuit of individual interests. (...) How can you say to me, who has come from London, that we are not able to agree on this with other institutions, because their regulations say differently? I say, if it is an obstacle for collaboration, your priority has to be to change this (21–30, UK, representative of a diaspora organisation).

The interviews demonstrated that although at higher policy levels declarations are made about involving Lithuanians from abroad, ordinary officials may lose sight of this somewhere at the lower levels. On the *Create for Lithuania* programme, for example, although ideas were welcomed at the higher levels of state institutions, participants nevertheless encountered numerous difficulties. Other respondents also told of cases where state officials or embassies initially displayed a willingness to help, but later failed to fulfil their promises because of lack of time or other reasons. For some respondents the state institutions' approach was simply uncaring:

Perhaps something [the willingness to involve diaspora] is affirmed, but I don't think that anything much is done. For example, a simple case, here we needed some posters of Lithuania for one of the presentations about Lithuania. And we tried to enquire everywhere possible, in order to get some posters. It appeared, we were told, that there are no posters. So, somehow, the attitude was rather uncaring. (...) Such things sometimes drive one away and make one think pessimistically (41–50, Luxembourg, official at an EU institution).

Respondents noticed a formal attitude towards communication with the diaspora even from those responsible for it, such as employees of embassies of the Republic of Lithuania; they observed that it depended very much on the particular individuals working there at the time: *Now the embassy has become somewhat formal (...) I think now they are not really interested* (41–50, Austria, performer); *There was one ambassador, who herself wanted to keep in contact; (...) the present ambassador shows passive initiative, only as much as is written* (41–50, Ireland, representative of a diaspora organisation).

Importantly, all the interviewees had been disappointed by this kind of experience with state institutions, and a single negative experience is likely to dissuade them from further involvement:

There is a very small likelihood that diaspora will invest in Lithuania, because they don't get enough in-formation. The Lithuanian government is so bureaucratic that any request disappears like in a black hole. People who have had such experience stop thinking seriously about the possibility of investing in Lithuania (31–40, Lithuania, representative of a diaspora organisation).

In the words of academics, lack of efficiency on the Lithuanian side also diminishes the motivation to take on new projects in the future: *You cannot carry the team as a backpack the whole time* (21–30, UK, scientist). Thus, although qualitative interviews do not allow for generalised conclusions, the assumption is that even individual negative experiences present a problem, since people are prone to make generalisations about all institutions, which then affects their motivation to collaborate. Besides, they expect that the goal of involving the diaspora will be a priority that would result in exceptions where appropriate.

'Lithuanians, not emigrants': attitudes in society towards emigration

In addition to the specific obstacles in communicating with the diaspora, Lithuanians from abroad also mentioned, as a receptivity issue, how accepted and wanted they feel in Lithuania. As was discussed in the theoretical part of the article, society's attitudes towards the part of the nation living abroad are important because they provide a background to diaspora policy and can influence the way institutions function.

The opinion of respondents in this respect is also quite negative: they think that society in Lithuania is not positively disposed towards Lithuanians living abroad. They think that there are *quite often accusations that, you know, they left to have a richer life or something like this* (41–50, Luxembourg, official at an EU institution). It is important to note that even politicians are thought to hold this type of attitude: *Some politicians shouldn't… shouldn't declare such a negative attitude, because it really does not encourage people to come back and [do] something* (41–50, Luxembourg, official at an EU institution). The problem was also noted by the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

We often see, particularly when we deal with Lithuanian politicians, the attitude that if they left, let them be on their own, why do they need government support? Well, there is such a negative attitude in Lithuania. But it is changing. I've seen even during the last few years that it is changing (41–50, Lithuania, representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Another respondent noticed that the terms used to refer to Lithuanians living abroad also reflect attitudes in society. In her opinion, they should not be called *emigrantai* (emigrants), since it has negative connotations, but instead an integrative term *užsienyje gyvenantys lietuviai* (Lithuanians living abroad) should be used: *When journalists ask the question: 'you there, emigrants'… My first reaction is 'What emigrants? Girl, do you know what the word emigrants means? Say, Lithuanians living abroad'. You have to integrate them, they are Lithu-anians, not some emigrants; the very connotation of emigrant is negative* (31–40, USA, manager).

Explanations and implications: a discussion

The qualitative nature of our research and its subjective approach do not allow for definite generalisations and causal analysis. Possible explanations for the problems identified by the diaspora members interviewed, and their implications, are therefore presented here as a discussion.

Obstacles to collaboration between Lithuanians living abroad and Lithuanian institutions diminish the receptivity of Lithuania towards its diaspora. This perceived lack of receptivity can reduce the diaspora's willingness to collaborate, as shown in our interviews. However, some of those from abroad collaborate despite the obstacles, because their strong intrinsic motivation makes the obstacles seem smaller or possible to overcome: *If you want to participate, none of the [issues] listed is an obstacle* (comment in the survey). Motivation to cooperate is strong, which is also clear from the interviews: several respondents, discussing obstacles to collaboration, mentioned that perhaps they were not determined enough, not firm enough to push for what they wanted. One respondent observes negatively the fact that the motivation of international Lithuanians to collaborate might be higher than that of the state institutions, whose function must be to communicate with Lithuanians living abroad and seek to involve them in joint activities:

> *But it is very difficult to start this bureaucratic machine moving. Now it has completed a cycle and perhaps it will start moving in that direction. Until now there has been very little effort. Therefore we have to observe the situation ourselves and get involved, since the push from Lithuanians from abroad is now definitely stronger* (21–30, UK, representative of a diaspora organisation).

The interviews with the representatives of ministries that are part of the *Global Lithuania Programme* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Culture, and embassies in other countries) show that they understand the goals of involving the diaspora and declare their openness towards it, and also that they are aware of some of the problems facing Lithuanians living abroad in their pursuit of professional relationships with Lithuania. For example, the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasised efforts to create trust between Lithuanians living abroad and institutions in Lithuania, as well as Lithuanian society. However, the obstacles at lower organisational levels that are repeatedly indicated in the interviews implies that although the will to involve the diaspora may have been affirmed at the political level, it has not necessarily penetrated into the bureaucratic structures of state and academic institutions where the dominant attitudes and work culture may be opposed to the new influences introduced by the diaspora, or may simply not be capable of exploiting its potential effectively. In other words, the goal of involving the diaspora that is declared at the higher policy levels gets lost in the lower levels of bureaucracy, where collaboration with the diaspora ceases to be a priority or is not so strong a priority as to overcome the usual bureaucratic routines and obstacles.

A possible explanation may be related to the dominant attitudes towards the diaspora in society. A reference to Balcerowicz's (1995) ideas may be relevant here: he claims that understanding of institutional change cannot be dissociated from human dispositions in a whole society. Thus human dispositions (values, ways of thinking) might explain how and why institutions work in a particular way. In this sense, the problems of the diaspora when dealing with Lithuanian institutions are merely a reflection of the prevailing relationship between Lithuanians and their co-citizens living abroad. And this relationship is still somewhat problematic, as other surveys and studies reveal. Almost 40 per cent of Lithuanians abroad perceive a negative attitude from Lithuanians in Lithuania towards emigrants (Vilmorus 2014). In contrast, attitudes towards economic migrants are rather positive (80 per cent of respondents in a representative survey hold positive attitudes towards those who have left the country for economic reasons), although the phenomenon of emigration is viewed negatively (70 per

cent evaluate emigration as a negative phenomenon) (Budginaitė 2012). In other words, its possible benefits to the development of the country are not recognised. In addition, the experience of those who come back to live and work in Lithuania is not appreciated. A large proportion of return migrants claimed that their experience abroad was not an advantage when looking for a job, and 8 out of 10 employers claimed they would prefer an employee without emigration experience over one with such experience (Žvalionytė 2015). Also, the media tend to depict emigration in a predominantly negative light: on an individual level, emigration is mostly framed as an opportunity, while on the societal level it is more often framed as a negative phenomenon, with the possible benefits to society underrepresented (Nevinskaitė 2015). These findings mirror the opinion of respondents in the present study about experience acquired abroad being disregarded.

Another possible explanation is time related: the *Global Lithuania Programme* was launched fairly recently (in 2011) and it is possible that there has not been enough time for higher-level policy tasks to be translated into corresponding attitudes and practices at all levels of the institutions. If we want state institutions and other organisations to be genuinely responsive to the initiatives of the skilled diaspora, the idea of diaspora involvement has to be spread more widely and discussed sufficiently for it to become an unquestionable priority.

On the micro level (on the level of interaction), unwillingness to accept different approaches may be explained by theories that analyse knowledge transfer in more general (non-diaspora) contexts. For example, acculturation theory interprets knowledge transfer as a culture contact, with diaspora members acquiring ideas, attitudes or practices from another culture and experiencing cultural difficulties on return to the home country or, in this case, when dealing with people from the original culture (cf. Bochner 2006). Barriers to knowledge transfer can be explained by theories of knowledge management. On the knowledge recipient's side, the most important of these is the 'not-invented-here syndrome' – a negative attitude to knowledge that comes from outside one's own organisation (Kathoefer and Leker 2012). Power issues may also be at play in the processes of knowledge transfer (Williams and Baláž 2008).

On the other hand, as noted in the literature (Kuznetsov 2008), diaspora involvement might help to transform the very same institutions at home, since the diaspora brings new approaches and new work cultures – this is precisely the nature of social remittances. As the representative of Invest in Lithuania said in the interview, the goals of the *Create for Lithuania* programme go beyond making something good for Lithuania and include the task of inducing changes in state institutions: *The main goal is anyway, as I would say, to change the public sector. That is, to demonstrate different principles of work* (21–30, representative of Invest in Lithuania). As she said in the interview, the institutions are starting to acknowledge the benefits and accommodate to the new approaches introduced by the project's participants, so diaspora involvement may indeed start the 'virtuous cycle' of institutional change (Kuznetsov 2008).

Implications for policy development confirm some of the ideas expressed elsewhere in literature. Further publicity on diaspora contributions and discussions in society are needed in order to change popular attitudes towards emigration. As regards policy, while the quality of the home institutions is not satisfactory, efforts to involve the diaspora should focus on highly motivated champions, whose intrinsic motivation helps them to overcome obstacles and achieve results (Kuznetsov 2006). It is also recommended that the public sector should not be directly involved in diaspora programmes; its role should rather be to facilitate diversity of initiatives from the bottom up (as Kuznetsov (2012: 13) suggests, 'let one thousand flowers bloom') and to provide a framework for sharing information and exchanging good practices.

Conclusion

Exploiting diaspora potential depends, among other factors, on the receptivity of the country, which means an ability and willingness to accept its contribution. In the long term, this factor may be more important than the size of the diaspora or individual initiatives by diaspora members.

The analysis presented in the article reveals a number of obstacles that diaspora professionals face when engaging in knowledge transfer with institutions in Lithuania (both state and academic), which could be regarded as embodying a lack of this receptivity. These obstacles include mistrust of the government in general, the lack of openness of Lithuanian institutions and society towards different experiences, the rigidity and inefficiency of institutions, and perceived negative attitudes in society towards emigration. As the interviews imply, all these factors decrease the motivation of diaspora professionals to collaborate with institutions in Lithuania.

The findings confirm the home-country receptivity factors identified by other researchers: an efficient bureaucracy, welcoming attitudes towards diaspora contributions, the importance of trust between the diaspora and the home country's government and positive attitudes towards emigration in organisations and society as a whole. The present study, moreover, shows these factors at work: how the lack of these positive factors is perceived as an obstacle by the diaspora members themselves; and how this translates into negative motivation to collaborate. The present study also confirms, although tentatively as yet, the influence of collaborative efforts on institutional change in the home country, in other words, the existence of collective social remittances.

A somewhat surprising aspect of the findings was the notable lack of appreciation of the knowledge and experiences acquired by diaspora members in other countries (in all cases, more developed than Lithuania). In the research literature, the contributions of the diaspora are explicitly or implicitly considered to be positive, while the present study shows that the attitudes of the 'receiving' side might be different, at least as seen through the eyes of those on the 'giving' side. Perhaps this is related to the nature of social remittances, which aim to change some general habitual behaviours, such as the ways of project management or other work practices, or to the fact that the benefits of this kind of change are less tangible.

The analysis reveals that, while at the highest policy level positive attitudes towards collaboration are expressed, and programmes for collaboration exist, diaspora professionals repeatedly report obstacles to the process of collaboration. An important conclusion therefore follows: there may be a discrepancy between the policy that is declared and how it functions in reality; formally, opportunity structures for diaspora contributions may exist, but in reality they do not function entirely smoothly. Thus future research should not be limited to the analysis of diaspora policy, but should place more emphasis on studying its functioning at the micro level and on the experiences of those that are the subjects of this policy.

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