Thumbnail Image:

Jan 16, 2018 by Katarzyna Rybka-Iwanska

Knowledge Diplomacy Part III: The Mobility of Talent [1]

I am currently reading *Hit Refresh*, a bestselling business book by Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella. Among many stories, the author reveals his and his wife's experiences migrating from India to the U.S. in the late 1980s. Even though both of them were promising bright minds—students of IT engineering and architecture—it took them a long time and some risky decisions before they could reunite on American soil and settle there for good.

As I wrote in Part I and in Part II of this CPD Blog series on knowledge diplomacy, the game over talents goes global, which means that both developed and developing countries play it. They introduce innovative solutions aimed at attracting the bright minds they need. As for now, the U.S. is still the biggest talent magnet of the world and, according to the OECD, pulls in around 25% of all international students. Who knows, however, if another Satya Nadella of, let's say, the 2040s, would be as desperate and motivated as Satya Nadella of the 1980s to develop his engineering career in the U.S., especially if Microsoft's cloud inventions would enable him to learn and work from any place in the world.

Parts I and II focused on the perspective of states. In Part III, the employee (student/researcher/scientist) perspective will take center stage. What are the patterns of migration for bright minds? How are their migration decisions rooted? What do they—i.e., the demanding millennial generation—expect from both the states/cities they migrate to and their employers? How can they influence the countries they migrate to?

The Global Competitiveness Report argues that "the nature of innovation has shifted: from being driven by individuals working within the well-defined boundaries of corporate or university labs, innovation increasingly emerges from the distributed intelligence of a global crowd," especially thanks to digital solutions, connectedness and temporary mobility of highly-skilled specialists. These specialists do not feel limited by geographical and state boundaries, and they are mobile more than ever before. According to the Global Talent Competitiveness Report, "with the internet and connectivity, moving knowledge and ideas across borders has never been easier. The cross-fertilisation of ideas between, say, Africa and Europe that once took decades can now happen in minutes."

Therefore, we should talk more of "brain circulation" rather than "brain gain" or "brain drain." This may be one of major trends in global economy of the future that will influence migration and other public policies worldwide. The mobility of talents will increase, and the market of knowledge and high skills will broaden. Responsible countries should get ready for that.

The most agile governments know that it is not enough to get people from abroad on R&D contracts—a truly sustainable model will build competence and skills across the population in preparation for tomorrow.

Defining the millennial generation as demanding may sound unfair, but I do not use this phrase in a negative sense. This best-educated generation in the history of humankind expect a lot from the countries and cities they live in, as well as from their employers. “A lot” does not necessarily mean ultra-fast Wi-Fi and a Starbucks on every corner. It means something more than simply cultural and leisure offerings or sustainable transportation.

According to *Forbes*, millennials want “connection to causes.” This generation wants to live, study and work in places and under conditions where they can have a positive impact on their community and ensure a good future for their children. If a country or a company wants to pull the brightest of the bright, the promise of a high salary is not enough. Meaningful employment is key, and if it is lost, millennials leave.

Every innovative country and employer should analyze these demands and expectations. This process is not necessarily due to the need for brains to help solve dilemmas in defense, transportation or medicine. The big consequence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is the fact that both developed and developing countries face exponential challenges stemming from the automation and robotics. The majority of routine tasks at some point will probably be performed by machines.

Therefore, as suggested in Pearson’s report on the future of employment, “investments in skills must be at the centre of any long-term strategy for adjusting to structural change.” Also, according to the Global Human Capital Report, “building up deep, diverse and resilient talent pools and skills ecosystems in their economies that allow for inclusive participation in good quality, skilled jobs by the largest possible number of people,” thanks to the insights, recommendations and experience of these brightest minds, can serve as a tremendous benefit to receiving countries—and the cause millennials want to be associated with.

In another part of the report, the authors try to convince their readers that “[h]ow nations develop their human capital can be a more important determinant of their long-term success than virtually any other factor.” The most agile governments know that it is not enough to get people from abroad on R&D contracts—a truly sustainable model will build competence and skills across the population in preparation for tomorrow.

Highly educated and skilled employees from various parts of the world bring with them ideas for innovative education and life-long learning and hence should serve as an inspiration for future-oriented reforms of educational systems in the countries to which they migrate.

Note from the CPD Blog Manager: This article is Part III of a three-part series on knowledge diplomacy as a significant soft power tool, with a focus on major trends defining international relations in the field of talent and knowledge. Read *Part I* and *Part II.*