

6th International Conference "Ohrid- Vodici 2018"

**"Diaspora, Transnationalism, Transculturalism and
Inter-Cultural Communications as New Forms of
Social Capital"**



6-та Меѓународна конференција „Охрид- Водици 2018“

**„ДИЈАСПОРА, ТРАНСНАЦИОНАЛИЗАМ,
ТРАНСКУЛТУРАЛИЗАМ И ИНТЕР-
КУЛТУРНИ КОМУНИКАЦИИ КАКО НОВА
ФОРМА НА ОПШЕСТВЕН КАПИТАЛ“**

- Зборник на трудови-

6-та Меѓународна конференција
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Editor

Rubin Zemon

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THE MACEDONIAN DIASPORA IN OVERSEAS COUNTRIES: FROM ETHNIC ISOLATION TO TRANSNATIONALISM

ABSTRACT

Members of the Macedonian diaspora are comfortable in, and have a sense of belonging in both Macedonia and Overseas Countries, with both countries featuring strongly in their personal identity. It is clear that transnationalism is a prominent feature of Macedonian life. The duality of Macedonian identity is also manifest in their language use and skills, with high rates of fluency and literacy in both Macedonian and English. Use of Macedonian clearly reinforces Macedonian identity. This in turn facilitates access to Macedonian media, which itself further reinforces the Macedonian element in the person's identity. These show that there are a number of means by which the Macedonian diaspora is reproduced. These include a high number of visits to the homeland, family ties and regular communication between the countries. Engagement in this contact reinforces knowledge, care and identification with R. Macedonia. What is also evident is that the main driver of the diaspora's relationship with the homeland is strong family ties. This primarily explains visitation, communication and the emotional concerns and empathy. It is often the extended rather than nuclear family that ties the diaspora to the homeland, and as such the nature of the family unit and its status within Macedonian culture is arguably the most important driver in maintaining a diaspora-homeland relationship. Ties with Macedonia may be weakening for younger Macedonians born in overseas countries. This is evidenced by lower levels of engagement and identification than those born overseas, and a diminution in the depth and nature of ties is likely. This means that other models for engagement between this younger overseas born diaspora and the homeland are necessary if these ties are to be maintained. Social media is one obvious tool that can be effectively utilised for this purpose.

Key words: diaspora, Macedonian identity, ethnic isolation, transnationalism

INTRODUCTION

The emigration of Macedonians in overseas countries appeared to some degree in the social, economic, political and cultural development of Macedonia. From the second half of the 18th century until today all the primary and secondary reasons for the emergence, development and emigration

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from Macedonia are mentioned. If a historical retrospective is made, it will be revealed that the basis of emigration is of economic character. The term emigration relates to the term employment, which in the broad sense of the word means a person who painstakingly saves. This is primarily an economic movement outside the birthplace of Macedonians of different age, spent both rural and urban.

Macedonian community in overseas countries was originally established as an economic diaspora in the 1920s. More recently, and despite the conflict and instability in the Balkans, it can be described as a "quality of life" diaspora. This is a community whose migration and settlement is determined by the pull factor of economic and lifestyle opportunities in overseas countries, rather than being forced to leave Macedonia as such. The Macedonian community has indeed made the most of the "quality of life" opportunities that overseas countries provides, as shown by the positive outcomes achieved in terms of professional and educational status. Macedonians feel very much at home in , and their high uptake of overseas countries citizenship appears to reflect both practical considerations and their actual identity. This is a community that is comfortable in the two worlds that define diaspora: the old ethnic homeland and the newly settled diaspora. The strong sense of belonging in overseas countries coexists with a very high degree of identification with the ethnic homeland which is central to the community's identity. This is manifest in multiple ways: high visitation rates with the homeland, the consumption of Macedonian media and high personal communication with the homeland.

The emigrants from the R. Macedonia in large cities (Toronto, Detroit, Gary, Adelaide and Sydney) spontaneously inhabit certain settlements. Thus, some emigrant colonies are created in overseas countries. The Macedonian emigrants who have already started there welcome their relatives, and give them selfless help until they meet. On the other hand, expatriates want to be close to their kinsmen in order to eliminate the psychological trauma caused by relocation and living in another environment. Those who are already there want to increase the number of their relatives due to mutual friendship and organized gathering. The main places where Macedonians meet in overseas countries are the Macedonian Orthodox Churches in which a large number of expatriates come every week. Churches have a religious and secular function. After religious services in the evening, dances and plays are organized almost every week. Also organized are celebrations of the Macedonian national holidays. When weddings or baptisms are made, Macedonians invite almost all of their relatives. However, certain members of the third generation of Macedonian immigrants are starting to shift from the Macedonian ghettos to other parts of the city in search of an even better standard and success in life.

DUALITY OF MACEDONIAN IDENTITY IN OVERSEAS COUNTRIES

Under the Macedonian ethnic community in overseas countries we mean Macedonian emigrants in one place who are interconnected and organized collectively through the Churches, cultural arts, educational and sports associations. The basis of this community is the national affiliation and the need of its members for national affirmation and expression. Macedonian emigrants want to be affirmed because they have been anonymous for a long time and this has bothered them. Participate in traditional parades, festivals for folk and entertaining music, sports competitions and New Year's parties. Macedonians are members of these communities to preserve their national identity, language, culture, tradition, customs and religion. Also through these communities, parents keep their children for themselves. They feel the fear of other people's culture not to take their children. They insist that their children go to Macedonian celebrations, dances, and picnics where they associate with each other. In the end, the animal is interested in their children getting married with Macedonians. However, Macedonian ethnic communities cannot be isolated oases in societies in overseas countries. By transmitting their cultural values and traditions, they simultaneously receive the cultural values of the new environment in the United States, Australia and Canada, while retaining their national identity. Multicultural societies such as Australia and Canada are also interested in this. A significant proportion of Macedonian emigrants have dual citizenship. They integrate it into the societies of overseas countries, but do not break the ties with their native land, origin and past.

The duality of Macedonian identity is also expressed through language use and skills with high rates of fluency and literacy in both Macedonian and English. Use of Macedonian language clearly reinforces Macedonian identity. This in turn facilitates access to Macedonian media which itself further reinforces the Macedonian element in the person's identity. Property ownership in Macedonia is another characteristic of the transnational nature of the diaspora. The high rate of property ownership in Macedonia by members of the diaspora also adds another deep layer of connection to the homeland. Given that such acquisitions were regarded as a good financial investment, this is a perhaps means by which to encourage investment in Macedonia that simultaneously serves to enhance the diasporas relationship with the homeland. The main driver of the diaspora's relationship with the homeland is family ties. This primarily explains visitation, communication and the emotional concerns and empathy. It is often the extended rather than nuclear family with whom the diaspora have ties in the homeland, so the nature of the family unit and its status within Macedonian culture is arguably the most important element in maintaining a diaspora-homeland relationship. Members of the diaspora often combine

visiting family with having a holiday. With these holidays often have a "roots tourism" dimensions.

MASS MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION WITH HOMELAND

Along with visits, mass media use and personal communication are a cornerstone of diaspora-homeland ties. Locally and overseas produced Macedonian language media is widely accessed by the community in overseas countries, often in order to keep up to date with political and current affairs developments in the homeland. Social media is having a strong influence on the nature of both private and public diaspora-homeland ties. Facebook in particular, allows for ongoing contact with greater frequency. It allows the benefit of sharing broader information and mediums, such as photos and videos, that expands the scope of information exchange. Although this is a medium between individuals and is thus in the private realm, its impact often extends to the public realm of political and community organisation. Indeed, Facebook is a link not only between the overseas diasporas and the homeland, but also between the Macedonian diaspora in other countries. Similar to Facebook, Skype is a new technology that has been actively embraced by the Macedonian diaspora. It allows for visual as well as audio communication, enhancing the qualitative nature of the contact with the homeland. Thus it is not the only frequency of contact that Skype allows which enhances diaspora-homeland relations, but also the nature of the contact it facilitates.

Interest in the political circumstances of the homeland is one distinct expression of Macedonian identity in overseas countries. While all forms of media are used to share information of interest to the diaspora on political and current affairs. There is a disconnection between the level of concern expressed about these issues and the absence of action in relation to them. The very high degree of conviction on political issues between overseas countries and R. Macedonia suggests that the community can increase its lobbying efforts on issues of concern, primarily relating to name recognition and overseas countries diplomatic representation in Skopje. As long as these issues remain unaddressed, the Macedonian community in overseas countries is likely to feel disadvantaged and discriminated against by the overseas countries Governments. The fact that members of the Macedonian community tend to consider these policies when they cast their vote in overseas countries elections is a factor the community could utilise to enhance their lobbying efforts.

Given the importance of language and family ties, there is clearly scope for greater involvement of the diaspora with the homeland. One aspect of this, and a direct example of brain circulation, is Macedonians from overseas countries living and working permanently or temporarily in the homeland.

There is clearly scope to develop a formal strategy to encourage and facilitate such a return with all the brain circulation benefits that will follow. While the skills and networks of the diaspora can assist the homeland's economic development. One barrier to the diaspora's permanent or temporary return to the homeland is the weak economic situation in the homeland where salary levels are low. Tax policy in relation to temporary or permanent diaspora returnees is an issue the Macedonian Government may want to consider to advance of this scenario. The culture and way of life in the homeland is a pull factor for the diaspora which the Government in Macedonia is failing to utilise as a mechanism to attract more members of the diaspora to live and work in the homeland. A major obstacle to meaningful public ties in the homeland are perceptions of corruption and a political culture that lacks the principles of good governance experienced by the diaspora in overseas countries .

PROFESSIONAL TIES OF MACEDONIAN DIASPORA IN HOMELAND

Transnational care giving is not a strong feature of the Macedonian diaspora-homeland relationship having ties to friends and family in R. Macedonia. In terms of remittances and philanthropy, this was primarily limited to family and was not of significant financial amounts. Given the economic resources of the community in overseas countries, the level and range of philanthropy to causes in the Homeland is clearly an area for potential development. This may be a matter both for developing a culture of giving and frameworks for giving in the diaspora, but also presenting more philanthropic option in the homeland. Given the mistrust of official systems and organisations in R.Macedonia discussed earlier, it follows that philanthropy occurred in a more informal way, often tied to the place where people originate from. The place of origin remains an important element of identification with the homeland. Developing philanthropic and other ties based on this basis may be an option for a Macedonian diaspora strategy. While business and professional ties with Macedonians are low, motivation to have trade and professional engagement with the homeland is high. These are driven by connections to kin, identity and a national pride, rather than pure business and professional reasons. There is clearly an enormous degree of social capital in terms of language skills and networks that the diaspora offers as a basis for enhancing trade with the homeland. However, there is little evidence of this being utilised by either the USA, Canadian, Australian or Macedonian Governments. The data suggest that were such frameworks created for such engagement, the community would respond and that organisational contacts would facilitate networks that extend beyond family and friends.

If more formal diaspora engagement in a wide array of public life, from commerce, to philanthropy is to be encouraged, government, business and NGOs in R.Macedonia will need to assure the diaspora that governance issues are addressed. Such measures would significantly enhance the potential for diaspora engagement in the homeland on multiple levels, such as trade, relocation and involvement on public life. Flowing from the issues raised above, formal contact with business and professional associates remains very low. There was a feeling that the community in overseas countries has tried to develop business ties with Macedonia, but these efforts are not supported or facilitated. Macedonian community organisations in Australia, USA and Canada are clearly failing to attract and retain community members. Perceptions of such organisations being personal fiefdoms protected by the "old guard" who are unwilling to make way for younger members of the community threatens to disenfranchise many Macedonians, particularly younger Macedonians, from being associated with formal community life. Many of the community organisations operating in overseas countries are also failing to tap into and advance the high sense of Macedonian identification in the community, and as a result such organisations are failing the community in overseas countries. If these issues are addressed, community organisations can have a much more active and productive role in facilitating more public diaspora engagement in the homeland. Association and involvement with organised public life in R. Macedonia, including in economic, social and political organisations, was of a limited nature. The community does participate extensively in events featuring visiting dignitaries, artists or celebrities from Macedonia so these should be considered by the local community as an important tool for engaging the community and an area for potential expansion. Such events are a "win win" as they involve the diaspora and enhance their identity and raise the potential for the homeland to involve the diaspora in their public life.

CONCLUSION

There was a feeling that the Macedonian community in overseas countries has tried to develop business ties with Macedonia, but the bureaucracy in R. Macedonia is an obstacle. Bureaucracy in R.Macedonia was a huge frustration to participants indicating that there is a need for the development of mechanisms to facilitate trade between two countries in order to overcome negative perceptions and experiences. Transnationalism is a prominent feature of Macedonian life. However, despite the high identification with being Macedonian it is important to recognise that there are factors that mitigate against this, including marriage between Macedonians and non-Macedonians which brings other cultures, languages and potentially homelands into the equation. While high identification by the diaspora,

evidence was also provided that younger non-professional members of the community identify less. This is an area of potential further research, as well as being an issue the community needs to consider.

Overall, it can be said that identification and engagement with the homeland is very high for those born in overseas countries and those aged over and under 40. However, given the relatively recent migration to overseas countries, the widespread knowledge and use of Macedonian is not surprising. The question is whether this will diminish as native Macedonian speakers pass away and subsequent generations of ethnic Macedonians are born in overseas countries. Those born in have lower levels of engagement and identification than those born overseas, and as subsequent generations are born in overseas countries and are further removed from the original migration in the homeland, a diminishing in depth and nature of these ties is likely. This means that other models for engagement between this younger born diaspora and the homeland will need to be developed. Social media is one obvious tool that can be effectively utilised for this purpose. Innovative tourism packages customised to the diverse needs and expectations of the Macedonian youth is another strategy for connecting them with R. Macedonia. These may include cultural, educational, adventure, environmental and other forms of tourist.

The young generation is educated within the Macedonian tradition. Parents constantly suggest to their children how to behave. The greatest influence on young people is exercised by their parents when choosing their future spouse. In this case, the youth are exposed to some kind of psychological pressure by the parents. On the other hand, the young generation is influenced by the social institutions in their social life. Children are in a very specific situation of double pressure. How this process develops can not be assumed with certainty. It will probably move in two directions. In one, young people will continually receive the socio-cultural influence of overseas countries, while in the other they will try to maintain their national identity. The emigration to the overseas countries of R. Macedonia is a manifestation of difficult economic and social conditions and seeking an exit for a better material basis of life for itself and for its family. The income of the expatriates was influenced by the general economic situation, especially in the villages in R. Macedonia. In its essence, emigration is a kind of exporting labor force. Within this framework, it should be treated as an economic category in terms of the elements that comprise labor and labor relations. The basic motive that forces most of the Macedonians to move out is determined by economic reasons.

The majority of Macedonians in overseas countries live in Macedonian ethnically clean communities. The largest emigrant colonies are in Toronto, Detroit, Gary, Adelaide and Sydney. Macedonian communities help expatriates to more easily overcome the problems of adaptation and acculturation

in their social environments. How will the evolution of the Macedonians in the overseas countries develop further depends on the socio-economic, social, political and cultural development of R. Macedonia as a country of emigration on the one hand and social and economic and cultural development and immigration policies of the United States, Canada and Australia as immigration countries.

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