

## *Enterprising Diasporas: From Brain Drain to Brain Gain*

Report on conference

SEESOX's Greek Diaspora Project and Reload Greece

London Business School, 24 September 2016

On September 24, 2016 SEESOX co-sponsored with Reload Greece and the London Business School a conference, entitled 'Enterprising Diasporas: From Brain Drain to Brain Gain'. The Conference was both highly productive in its substance and, relatedly, an example for SEESOX's Greek Diaspora Project mode of action.

Among the issues discussed were the nature of crisis-driven Greek entrepreneurship and synergies with the diaspora; the wider involvement of the diaspora in Greece's future up to and including participation in policy debates and public life; examples of nonprofit activity involving the diaspora and having a tangible impact on social and economic life in Greece; templates of other diaspora-homeland interactions.

Below is a brief review of selected presentations of the conference which illustrate the richness of the debate.

Marina Hatsopoulos, a Boston-based entrepreneur, made three observations. First, how the lack of mid-level funding for Greek start-up companies makes them very focused, by comparison to US start-ups that tend to be showered with cash, on producing products and services that can generate cash flow from the very beginning of their operations. Second, the need for Greek start-ups to immediately internationalize their operations as there are a number of needed specialties which are not available in the small Greek market. Third, the example of the relationship between Israel and the city of Boston, making the point that when we think of diaspora-homeland linkages, we should also think of homeland linkages to urban centres abroad too.

Aristos Doxiadis, the managing partner of Open Fund which specializes on funding Greek technology start-ups gave us a very clear and persuasive cartography of evolving Greek comparative advantage. His elaboration of what constitutes 'unique offering' for future Greek start-ups definitely carries, as he himself pointed out, diaspora/homeland implications. According to Aristos a 'unique offering' refers to start-ups that are knowledge intensive, based probably on Greece's advanced research base, and which offer customized solutions to a select group of technologically advanced corporate clients based outside Greece. Such start-ups will need to operate through professional networks, avail themselves of regulatory and operational licenses and collaborate with well-established partners in particular industrial or service sectors. In all these fields, diaspora contacts and collaboration can facilitate market entry.

Panos Manuelides, a leading distributor of Greek food products in the UK, spoke of his personal experience as a diaspora Greek with no family tradition in the wholesale and distribution business who has managed to put traditional Greek products in leading, non-Greek, UK retailers. Historically Greek food and spirits exports enter foreign markets via first and second generation diaspora Greeks, of a low skill background, and with a focus on the ethnic market constituted by small retailers catering to diaspora Greeks and restaurants with a solely Greek or mixed Greek and non-Greek clientele. Panos, although he entered the

business through happenstance, he clearly had the background to assimilate and then propagate the essentials in packaging, consistency and so on, of highly advanced in global terms UK retailers, and to communicate these essentials to foodstuff producers back at home. An exception to the rule, he represents a template of the diaspora importer and distributor that the food and drinks sector in Greece needs, as the dramatic decline in domestic demand forces Greek firms to look at international markets.

Dimitris Vayanos, Professor of Finance at the LSE, gave us an example of the increasing involvement in the crisis years of Greece's technocratic and academic diaspora in Greece's policy debate. One of the most ambitious efforts yet of this trend is the book which is currently in preparation, with Dimitris as one of the co-editors, titled 'Beyond austerity: Reforming the Greek economy', where resident and non-resident Greek economists jointly address major policy issues. It is important to note that for most of the non-resident Greek economists the book represents a culmination of a process rather than a one-off event as, throughout the crisis, they have been active participants in the Greek policy debate via TV appearances, op-ed articles, conference participations and so on. Indicative also of the deeper consequences of this engagement is the request articulated by Dimitri for better and more comprehensive data on the Greek economy that would allow for superior policy prescriptions and for sound comparative studies involving the Greek case. An upgrade of Greek data would allow for an even more effective contribution of the diaspora community of economists to the Greek policy dialogue and information.

Angelos Gkanoutas-Leventis and Antonis Hatzopoulos vice presidents of the Greek Energy Forum and chairman of the Hellenic Bankers Association respectively, through the presentations of their organizations' activities underlined the tendency of Greek diaspora professionals to institutionalize their networking efforts. Although the initial motive might only relate to professional advancement within the host country, in this case the UK, such associations inevitably become loci for the sharing of expertise and opportunities relating to the homeland country.

Professor Elias Papaioannou of LBS, in his brief intervention as a moderator, compellingly linked the need of the Greek economy to internationalize, not least through acquiring access to heterogeneous inputs, necessary for the production of internationally attractive Greek goods and services, which are not available in Greece. Greek Diaspora actors are either producers of such inputs or can facilitate access to them.

Kiveli Dorken, a young, gifted pianist of mixed Greek-German parentage gave us an example of diaspora intermediation in her capacity as the artistic director of the Molyvos International Music Festival. Kiveli's venture belongs to the non-profit category but it is powerful manifestation of how Greek assets – in this case Molyvos one of the most beautiful towns of Lesbos – can be married with the diaspora's expertise and contacts – deriving from Kiveli's membership in a global community of classically trained musicians invited to perform in Molyvos – in order to redefine and internationalize these assets. This is particularly the case with Greece's unique and globally resonant cultural legacy, distributed among museums, archaeological sites and villages and towns which enjoy protected status in terms of their architecture, which are moreover spread all over the country and which cry out for an infusion of the skills and know how that the diaspora can offer.