

No unicorns but real-life success stories...

The disruptions of the digital era and the imminent Industry 4.0 are reshaping the expectations on the education system. The current situation in Slovakia calls for a dramatic change of mindset at different levels and concrete steps in reaction to these demands. And although this change is taking place at a frustratingly slow pace, there are organizations which have identified a clear goal and are making real progress. In close cooperation with the business sphere, LEAF has launched activities on several fronts. This demonstrates, that, with the right approach, ambitious goals can be reachable. Jana Trnovská, Head of Slovak Professionals Abroad Program at LEAF, reveals more about LEAF's mission and activities.



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BIOGRAPHY

What will be the critical skills to possess in the years to come in order to thrive in the Industry 4.0 reality?

Data gathered from the top 100 global employers in late 2015 by the World Economic Forum shows that two types of jobs will be the most sought after by the employers in the years to come — data analysts and sales specialists. However, the rapid changes, mostly of technological nature, in individual industries make it next to impossible to predict the specific hard skills an employee should have to beat the odds and secure work. So cyber-physical systems or not, complex problem-solving skills remain the sure way to go. Though uncertain about specific hard skills, the global employers agreed that over one third of future jobs in all industries will require a complex problem-solving skillset. Further in the list came social and process skills (critical thinking, active listening), demand for which is on the rise, since they are to be necessary for just under one fifth of all jobs.

It is this insight into, as well as uncertainty over, what the job market of the future will look like which influenced the curriculum of LEAF's educational activities – LEAF Academy and Butterfly Effect. Beside hard skills of choice, the ideal graduate possesses four key competencies

– communication, cooperation, critical thinking and creativity.

Do you think that education in Slovakia is keeping up with these demands?

Considering the performance of Slovak students in the most recent PISA testing, where they scored below OECD average in reading, mathematical and science skills, there is plenty of room – and need – for improvement.

The urgency of the necessary changes becomes even more evident when you look at the OECD report on automation that came out in March. Slovakia fared very badly. We came first in terms of the percentage (33%) of jobs being at high risk of automation.

How would you describe the main mission of LEAF?

LEAF seeks to make Slovakia a place where good quality of life is available to all. Slovakia, which is economically strong and has a strong economic grounding, is able to withstand the perils of turbulent global developments. This requires a strong generation of future leaders in both the business and the public sectors. And this is how we strive to contribute. We want to help develop future leaders and talents of Slovakia. We look for and identify

talents and then we work with them to help them reach their full potential. We help them develop values we consider crucial for being the leaders this country needs – character, excellence, leadership and civic engagement. Hence why we have set up several programs – for students, professionals and Slovaks abroad.

With the wide scope of programs you offer you are targeting various groups which will shape Slovakia's future. These include high school students, young professionals, teachers, or Slovaks living abroad. Which of these presents the biggest challenge and why?

Every single one has challenges of its own, whether it is working with experts who are too busy with their other activities, teachers who try to do their best in an environment that does not always let them, or Slovaks abroad who would love to return but "that specific field of marine biology they are in is only studied in one place in the world and it is not Slovakia". There is one challenge that applies to all and that is the number of opportunities available. We want to help this country progress and become the Singapore of Central Europe. For that, we need to scale. Unfortunately, demand surpasses the number of opportunities we provide so

WORK EXPERIENCE

- Head of Slovak Professionals Abroad Program, LEAF Organization (January 2017 – Present)
- Co-Founder, RapidData (2017 – Present)
- Assistant Lecturer, Faculty of Management, Comenius University in Bratislava (October 2016 – 2017)
- Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (2016 – 2017)
- Co-founder and Manager of TalentHub, LEAF Organization (November 2015 – 2017)
- LEAF Award Coordinator, LEAF Organization (2015)

EDUCATION

- UCL – Master of Science (MSc), International Public Policy (2014 – 2015)
- The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and King's College London, University of London (Bachelor of Arts – BA, International Relations)
- Sciences Po – Certificate, International Relations (2011 – 2012)



in the end we end up choosing some and "disappointing" others. The resulting "selectivity" is a big challenge I would like us to conquer. I am happy to say that we have entered a phase where we are going to change this and work with different numbers.

When it comes to Slovakia's ongoing brain drain, how does it compare to the situation in other CEE countries?

We monitor the data closely and the last two decades saw a very negative trend for Slovakia. The latest data was released by the Institute for Financial Policy. It shows that in the last 13 years, approximately 5% of our population left. Note that this is the net change, meaning that compared to the 814 thousand people who left, 545 thousand people have come to Slovakia. The last two years actually saw a positive trend where more people entered than left. Net emigration of Slovaks has indeed decreased but this positive trend is caused by an increasing number of foreign nationals moving to Slovakia. So far now, there are still more Slovaks who leave than those who return.

When it comes to the CEE countries, the data gets more complicated. In a nutshell, Slovakia and Poland are leading the way in terms of net emigration. Czech Republic, on the other hand, is doing the best of all V4 countries with the lowest numbers.

Slovak economy continues to grow at a solid pace; unemployment is at an all-time low. However, this doesn't seem to be enough to considerably slow down the brain drain. Why is it so and what would need to happen to reverse the trend?

Because economic growth and unemployment is only a part of the picture. Nothing significant has been done about the push factors such as low quality of university education, minimal funding for scientific research, low remuneration of nurses,

teachers, etc. The two biggest groups leaving Slovakia are 19-year olds and 25-year olds. Seeking a better education or a better paying first job, they go abroad and soon they end up knowing the local job market better there and form more social connections than back home. When it comes to pull factors, nothing significant is being done on a national level. Some countries provide financial incentives, easier bureaucratic solutions upon return and so on. In the absence of policies, "tailored communication" and job opportunities are what works best by far and this is what LEAF has been doing quite successfully over the last six years.

The business sphere should be a key partner in education. Business is fast and takes no prisoners. It is also key to the progress of any country or society. This is not to say that education should bend to the whims of business but if education is to be relevant, it has to reflect what the practical world is about.

What do you mean by tailored communication?

There is a clear perception gap when it comes to Slovakia. Notwithstanding the above mentioned factors, Slovakia is not what it was in 2010, nor

2015. The number of attractive opportunities, investments, scale ups, innovations, as well as "lifestyle options" has grown. Of course not in every field or region. However, opinion polls and anecdotal evidence show that this is not reflected in people's perceptions. Look at the most read news articles online. They generally paint an extremely bleak picture – as if everything was utterly bad here. Going forward, we are going to put more effort into communicating the positive side of Slovakia. No unicorns, rainbows or instagram halušky but real-life success stories of people, initiatives, companies... A lot of good and even amazing things are going on.

To what extent do you communicate and cooperate with the business sphere?

The business sphere is key to our activities. It is also one of my most favorite parts of our work. It is where our long-term vision of a better Slovakia meets with the daily demands of practical reality. We focus on the most valuable resource of Slovakia – people, and this is what business needs the most, too. Hence, cooperation with businesses lies at the heart of our offer for Slovaks abroad. Excluding a mother or a boyfriend, a job opportunity is by far the best motivator for return. At the same time, businesses are in dire shortage of certain skillsets. For this reason, we work with over 70 organizations, over half of them being companies from almost every industry. We work with them to help them address their needs in terms of human capital by leveraging the potential and untapped resource in the form of Slovak diaspora. We are not just giving people jobs, we are the go-to place for talented Slovak diaspora and as such our job is also about "selling Slovakia". These businesses are often the best real-life showcase of how far Slovakia can progress.

How do you perceive the role the business sphere should play in

education? Is this potential being realized in Slovakia?

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From the experience gathered through your programs, what are the strong points of the young generation of Slovaks and how could they translate into future positive developments of our country?

LEAF works with a small fraction of Slovakia's young generation so the factor of self-selection is not to be underestimated. Still, the young people LEAF works with make us very enthusiastic about what future holds for us. They have guts! They are not afraid to confront, experiment, express themselves, be different or take and feel responsibility. They are very passionate about making an impact. It has become a buzzword you hear daily. A recruiter has recently told me that he is fascinated by the genuine passion and drive among the Slovak applicants in the last few years. I have interviewed people for organizations all around Slovakia as well as for my team and "impact", "country" and "responsibility" are by far the most frequently mentioned words.