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How Dhaka can benefit from circular waste management

Vilim Borosa is a student of global sustainability science at Utrecht University and chemical engineering at the University of Zagreb. Dr Syed Saad Andaleeb is distinguished professor emeritus at Pennsylvania State University and former vice-chancellor of Brac University.

VILIM BOROSA and SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

LARGE firms offering both commercial and residential waste collection services make a nice bundle of money by collecting and processing trash in the West. Just consider the economic value in the following items: Bottles and cans, toys, metallic objects, boxes, paper products, books, clothing, and old mobile phones and computers – all thrown away without a thought about the negative externalities that it creates. Then there is the organic waste generated in millions of kitchens. Is this all trash or is there cash in trash? Cash may be interpreted as benefits not only for individuals, but also for communities, society, the economy, and the very environment that absorbs much of what we carelessly discard. Here, we explore the opportunities that lie hidden in the items that we flippantly discard. Instead of being used or reused, much of it ends up in the landfills.

Today's world is vibrant with innovation. In the last century, we were blessed with unprecedented technological and economic growth. Along with it, however, came new models, new technologies, and new ways of doing the same thing – perhaps more efficiently. As newer innovations made inroads, disposal of old solutions began to generate a mountain of discarded goods never seen or experienced. There is a great opportunity in all that people discard.

The garbage that we all generate every single day, in hundreds of thousands of tonnes, offers opportunities for economic growth, as well as social transformation. It can all be done through a simple yet effective system.

Firstly, the system in question needs to be designed to create a circular movement in all sectors of urban life, the environment, and the economy. Circularity means perpetual motion, and perpetual growth is the end goal. We must create a never-ending cycle that creates perpetual growth. Let's look at rain, for example. It is a part of a circular process. Water evaporates on a hot day to the atmosphere, and when it gets cold, it comes down to Earth to evaporate again, repeating the cycle endlessly. Our thinking uses this

simple principle of circularity with no resource loss. Instead of water, we move waste in a circular pattern endlessly, generating both economic and social value for citizens. Citizens are the ones who enable circular movement of waste, for which they ought to be rewarded with social/economic benefits. The scope of these rewards depends on their contribution to waste circularity, serving as a catalyst for economic and social growth for both individuals and communities.

Secondly, individuals and different communities within Dhaka can be incentivised to be the building block of the circular flow of waste, based on how well they contribute to the system and how much they accumulate

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individual and community points from the waste they help put in circular motion. The accumulated points then become enablers for personal and community growth, ranging from simple things which would make day-to-day life easier for individual households (e.g. a shopping coupon or a bus pass), to being able to decide what to invest in when talking about community upliftment (e.g. repairing roads, improving street lighting) or even receiving educational benefits or investible funds for sustainable start-ups. In other words, everyone of every background would be able to create a better world, while gaining rewards

for themselves and their community in the process. Through such an incentive system, Dhaka city could achieve crowdsourced innovation, stability, and citywide growth in multiple ways.

The entire city could be integrated into this new way of life by making it simple to participate in, while the system is highly rewarding for both individual households and different communities based on points accumulated. All it needs is the adoption of a digital application that is well-designed, and which efficiently incorporates the circular process. It must be simple for the users, but highly impactful by its ability to generate environmental, economic, and societal points from and for all Dhaka residents.

The circular process must be adaptable to the demands of the public and to the goals of the local government leadership, whereby people get exactly the kind of resources they want and need as a benefit for participating in the circular process.

Adaptability and being aligned with the needs of the broader public can make the idea of circularity indefinitely relevant for Dhaka city. It presents itself as a game, bringing everyone together like on a game night with your friends and family. It's a game which you can't lose by mere dedicated participation; but if you win (using the reward system correctly), the world can change around you for the better. This system would uplift everyone in the city while also building a powerful circular economy and a stable, happy and empowered society.

Finally, the idea of circularity can be perpetuated with community-building in mind through a creative endeavour of leadership, technology intervention, and astute management.

The proposed system – rather, a way of life – can be described as an overarching circular-waste-flow-inducing, smart-investment, community-building framework, which unifies a variety of factors for perpetual value generation in all sectors of life in Dhaka. A critical challenge will be to communicate the idea to the city residents to participate in this creative endeavour. A pilot project can make a real difference to make the idea successful.

This op-ed, the third in a four-part series, resulted from the authors' participation in the 23rd ASEF Summer University (ASEFSU'23) interdisciplinary hackathon on "Livable Cities for a Sustainable Future" envisioned by Asian and European young professionals and students

PROJECT SYNDICATE

A diaspora is a terrible thing to waste



Kent Harrington is a former senior CIA analyst and has served as a national intelligence officer for East Asia, chief of station in Asia, and the CIA's director of public affairs.

KENT HARRINGTON

THERE have been diasporas ever since the Old Testament, and, leaving aside their tragic nature, no two mass exoduses have been alike. In the twentieth century, the world witnessed Jews escaping from pogroms, the Bolshevik revolution, and then Hitler; African-Americans migrating en masse out of the Jim Crow South; and Vietnamese fleeing a war-torn country. In this century, Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghans have fled failed liberations and brutal sectarian wars; Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans have been walking away from poverty and violence; and, now, millions of newly arrived Ukrainians in Europe and elsewhere are wondering when or even if they will ever go home.

For some countries, diasporas also are not new. Just ask the Russians. For three-quarters of a century, Stalin's NKVD and its successor, the KGB, kept close tabs on expatriate Russians, constantly worrying about the threat they might pose. And now, Russian President Vladimir Putin's security service, the FSB, is continuing the tradition. According to recent FSB estimates, almost four million Russians left the country in the first three months of this year.

Obviously, FSB statistics are hard to verify. But the sheer magnitude of this year's departures is striking. Compared to the first quarter of 2021, Russian arrivals in Georgia and Tajikistan increased fivefold, and they grew fourfold in Estonia, threefold in Armenia and Uzbekistan, and twofold in Kazakhstan. Moreover, Latvia and Lithuania together took in some 74,000 Russians, and popular tourist spots like Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey welcomed just under a million. Nearly 750,000 people crossed into the Georgian region of Abkhazia, one of Putin's vassal territories.

While some of these travelling Russians doubtless returned home, the total number of departures in the first quarter is remarkable. It represents nearly two percent of the country's population, and that doesn't even count the Russians who have left for Europe or other parts of the world. The FSB isn't tracking these departures just to pass the time. From the October Revolution to the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian diasporas were flies in the ointment of the worker's paradise. While Russians had already started to flee in the wake of the failed 1905 revolution, these numbers surged when the Bolsheviks took power in 1917 and during the subsequent civil war. "Little Moscows" cropped up across Europe.

This history was repeated in the 1990s, but with a twist. Not only did the collapse of the Soviet Union leave 30 million ethnic Russians outside Russia's borders (primarily in the Baltics, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine), but several million more emigrated to Europe, Asia, and North America, producing the second major diaspora in the space of a hundred years.

Do such large expatriate communities really matter? That depends on your point of view. In the 1920s, exiled Russian monarchists, rightists, and assorted military veterans – the losers in the five-year-long civil war – continued to conspire against the Bolshevik regime. But they continued to embody all the divisiveness that had led to their earlier defeat. Likewise, in 2011, the German historian Karl Schlögel argued that today's Russian exiles lack the political structures to organise, and thus have

little potential to effect change in their home country.

But Schlögel also identified an important difference between the emigrés and refugees of the 1920s and Russia's twenty-first century expatriates: today's diaspora includes the most dynamic and entrepreneurial elements of Russian society, from business managers and information-technology specialists to scientists and artists. Their flight abroad represents a major brain drain. Igor Zubov, Putin's deputy interior minister, warned of this problem in June, when he asked the Russian parliament to allow more foreign IT workers to enter the country. In his testimony, he revealed that Russia was short some 170,000 IT workers, contradicting official claims that most of those who left had already returned home. The Russian Association for Electronic Communications has painted a similar picture. Industry insiders forecast that 10 percent of Russian IT workers may leave in 2022.

It's not just techies. As in the 1920s, hundreds of Russian journalists, writers, actors, filmmakers, and artists have also fled abroad, often resuming the same work in their countries of refuge. Investors and entrepreneurs, too, are leaving. Henley & Partners, a British firm that brokers citizenship deals for wealthy clients seeking to change their nationality, reports that 15,000 millionaires are expected to leave Russia in 2022. Most will try to domicile in Malta, Mauritius, or Monaco, where inviting beaches and lax tax laws welcome immigrants who come with cash.

Whether skilled professionals and Cristal guzzlers are leaving because of their opposition to Putin or for personal economic reasons, what matters is that they are depriving Russia of critical talent and capital. That is why the Biden administration has proposed legislation to loosen visa requirements for Russian IT workers and scientists with advanced degrees. And other countries and companies are making similar efforts to harness the benefits of the new Russian diaspora.

But these efforts will yield mostly private economic and financial gains, while the political potential of the diaspora remains untapped. If Western countries want to support Ukraine and confront Russian aggression, they ought to be doing more to bring together Russia's expatriate intellectual and financial capital, forming a real community abroad that can communicate with, and potentially influence, Russians back home.

A century ago, some 300,000 Russians – businessmen, writers, artists, and others – created Europe's leading "little Moscow" in Berlin, and by the mid-1920s, the city had some 150 Russian political journals and 87 publishers. Some of these were Soviet enterprises, but most were not. As Schlögel notes, the Russian exiles were attracted not only by Weimar Germany's freedom but also by its strategic location. It was a place where books, magazines, and political tracts could find their way into the new Soviet state.

In today's wired world, this episode in the history of print may sound quaint. But that is only because we have exponentially more powerful tools with which to disseminate information. Ultimately, only Russians can shape their country's fate. But the West has ample means at its disposal to help those who want change in their homeland.

Opinion

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ACROSS

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12 "Pal Joey" writer
13 Lunch hr. end, perhaps
14 Of the fleet
15 Oklahoma city
16 Sleep attire
18 Daiquiri need
19 Tenant
21 Black as night
22 Spots with no reception
24 Davis of "Beetlejuice"
25 Mandible, cranium, etc.

29 Preserves
30 Puts up
32 That fellow's
33 Unoriginal
34 Ray-gun sound
35 Writer Jong
37 Start of the Spanish year
39 Painter
40 Mail in
41 Homes for koi
42 Works hides

DOWN

1 Sandbar
2 Like the gentry
3 Anxiety
4 Custodian's tool
5 Mafia bosses

6 "That's it!"
7 Gorge
8 Train course
9 "Roots" writer
11 Got in the way of
17 Shameless woman
20 Long tales
21 Foolish
23 Not yet in stock
25 Bob, for one
26 Banner
27 Skin problem
28 Be the lead of
29 Canary sound
31 Places
33 Crew members
36 Heel
38 Take home

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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