

Lyubomyr Ostapiv: Your choice for future job: Ukraine or abroad?

I bet, Richard, my American friend, was surprised, while visiting my two-room apartment in an old, soviet-era building a week ago. I used to live in his hometown, 20 minutes away from sandy shores of the Atlantic ocean. Me and two Americans had rented a huge townhouse with three bedrooms, and what was astonishing for an Ukrainian, an individual bathroom for each of us. Compared to my current apartment in the center of Kyiv, the number of people is the same, the number of rooms is one less, my two friends have a connecting room. It is very hot without an air-conditioner and our cold water tap is usually broken. I think it broke for the second time during the last three months and plumber works only my working hours.

What is amazing about the comparatives is that, in fact, there was almost an equal monthly rent for that house in USA and my current apartment. However, do I plan to move out of an old soviet apartment and come back to roomy place at Atlantic seashore? Of course not, I would rather build a similar townhouse in Ukraine, and further, let me explain my answer to you.

To my deepest belief, if we take a young and active person like me, there are hundreds of small reasons to stay in Ukraine, which could be summarized in the three simple concepts. I will call them:

- an opportunity ocean
- a social network
- an emerging democracy

Under the “opportunity ocean” I mean the self-development possibilities that exist for young graduates in Ukraine. First of all let us analyze career path.

It has been two years already with a professional services provider and those years were a period of the fast professional growth for me. I have learned the best practices of corporate governance while working in the big project of US GAAP Audit and Sarbanes-Oxley requirements implementation. From June 1st I will receive a promotion, salary increase, and, what is more important: I will switch to consulting department. That means I will participate in financial and strategy advisory in future. Now the question is “if I had worked in New-York or London office of our company would I have the same amount of promotions, a salary increase and professional growth?”. I doubt so, as an incredible growth, that makes climbing over career ladder easier, happens only here, in Kyiv office.

There is one more thing to add about a career. The rumors that the professional career in Ukraine is solely about connections and bribes might be true regarding to the state authorities, but it has a little to do with a private business. The Flourishing private sector of the Ukrainian economy is looking for young talented people. When I graduated in 2003, the Kyiv Post Employment Fair was one of the few events, where students were able to learn about good employers and submit their resumes. In 2007 the Fair is organized four times a year and number of participating companies is ten times more. The most important, however, is change of the attitude, the companies are competing for the young talents now, it flows both ways. For instance, my company does not concentrate solely on Kyiv Post Fair anymore, it goes to the universities and makes presentations. Moreover, this year became the first, when presentations were made in the regional universities outside the Kyiv.

Certainly, the opportunities are not only about a career and money. The National essay competition is the opportunity to express own ideas. The sponsored by Djuice children’s football tournament and newly built football playgrounds are the opportunity for my nephew, who adores the game. The AIDS Alliance in Ukraine became an opportunity for my friend, as she wanted to work in social sphere and help people. The ocean of opportunities is full in Ukraine as it has never been before, it is a pleasure to swim in it.

Beside the opportunities, we should appreciate what we already have. The really important part of our personal life is social network, which I believe includes our relatives, friends, colleagues and

other people we happened to know. While move abroad, I can imagine doing it with loved person, but it is impossible to transfer a whole social network. Especially it is about parents. When they get older, you want to see them more often than once a year, which is much easier to do if the whole family lives in one country.

Speaking about my social network, I really appreciate my college buddies with whom we play football every Saturday morning, friendly volleyball with colleagues on Sundays, and fellow Toastmasters who listened to my first speech six month ago and who will listen to my project number six next Wednesday. Obviously, one can assume that if an adaptation is successful, new social contacts can be easily established upon the transfer. It might be true as there are sport sections and Toastmasters clubs abroad as well. But how many of sport players abroad will show interest in the political agreement between Ukrainian President and Prime-Minister and will be able to discuss the new elections outcome. While living abroad, how friends will I include in an e-mail invitation to watch the football match France – Ukraine on 2nd of June ? If live in France, I may find many interested, but I doubt they will share my interest in this game.

It is clear that people of one country have similar outlook, common history, traditions and beliefs. While is not impossible task to maintain small national communities and keep traditions in a foreign country, it is natural that homeland social network will always be richer and wider.

My first two concepts were more individual oppose to the third, which I named “emerging democracy”. I think it could be described by three statements:

- it is incredibly interesting to live it time of major historical changes
- starting 2004 the national identity of Ukrainians increased significantly
- citizens started to take active part in political and economic life of the country

23 of May, 2007 Kyivpost’s top article says “Survey: Ukrainians more interested in politics than Europeans, but less involved”. Due to results of the European Social Survey (ESS), a public opinion poll conducted in 24 European countries, Ukrainians are more interested in politics than most Europeans. No wonder. It’s fun to watch TV everyday. The political TV shows are among the top viewed, with Presidential debates of 2004 ranked number one on TV ever. The critics say it is bad, because the stability is required for economy. True, but to stay competitive any economy requires innovations. The political changes which are happening now in Ukraine are innovations for our society. It is movement towards the real democracy, I am sure Ukrainians feel very interested about it.

Beside the big political changes in Ukraine there is a high level of national identify, which, in my opinion, starts its rise from 2004. I have spent two summers of my life in USA, participating in an exchange program. The program has enabled students to work and travel in USA up to 5 months during their summer holidays. I saw the major turnaround in students’ answer to the question “Where are your from ?”. In 2002 most of the young people would say without enthusiasm “From Ukraine” and add that Ukarine is the post-Soviet state. Only a few patriots would tell more about the home country. In 2004 it has dramatically changed. Young people felt proud by saying “I am from Ukraine”. No surprise. Ruslana won an Eurovision song contest, Vitaliy Klichko became worlds’ heavyweight champion and Andriy Shevhehko received most prestigious individual football reward “Golden ball”. It all happened before end of June 2004. I came back to Ukraine in September 2004 and became active participant of powerful mass protest, known in the world as “Orange revolution”. That was the event that changed mentality of my co-citizens, they learned to fight for freedom and human rights. They felt they love their country and want to change it for better. Finally, they started to believe it is possible. Here is one more important reason not to go abroad, and stay home : When you believe in the statement “Proud to be Ukrainian”.

The transformation of this interest into civil activity has only started three years ago, but it is irreversible process. All over the country small groups of citizens self-organize and fight against

construction in Kyiv's green zones, uncontrollable dumps and pollution in Uzhgorod region and municipal tariff hikes in Donetsk. The civil society emerged in Ukraine as people understood they can make an influence. Ukrainian people are at the stage when they have learned how to protect our rights from violation. Soon they will learn how to demand from elected officials to fulfill their promises. The conclusion for that: if I believe I can change Ukraine for the better, I will not leave it in search for a new place.

If we speak about short period of time I really enjoyed my two summer trips to United States. My personality benefited a lot from living in the foreign culture and I think it expanded my outlook. I plan to enter top MBA school in United States in 3-5 years and to spend there two years of my life. Such a move, except the career improvement, will add a lot to my personality as well. But my next big step after the MBA is a return to Ukraine and an attempt to create something outstanding in business. No need to explain myself a long-term life strategy of living in Ukraine. I simply believe it is right one.

It is obvious that I see my future in this country and that Ukrainian youth is optimistic about country's development. I did describe the concepts of opportunity ocean, social network and emerging democracy to explain my answer to essay dilemma. To clarify it let me remind Oscar Wilde, who once said "To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist and that is all". The essence of my idea is that, in whole world of one hundred and ninety eight countries, Ukraine feels a cool place to live.