

## **Diasporas, development and the second generation**

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### **Abstract**

The new millennium has witnessed the proliferation of scholarship and research projects focusing on the nexus of migration and development (M&D). The dominant tendency in M&D research has been to assess the impact of diaspora's involvement in homeland development, often approached within the national frame of reference. More recently, attempts to problematize the nation-state centred logic in M&D research have emerged, although generally theoretically informed discussions on what this means for conceptualizations of "development" and "diaspora" have been rare. Drawing from scholarship on transnationalism, we discuss the transnational frame as a way to problematize the nation-state centred logic in understandings of "diaspora" and "development" in M&D research. This opens a venue to examine the means, motivations and agency in terms of diaspora members' – and their descendants' – cross-border activities with clear development goal towards the sending region and to better grasp how diasporas operate as transnational agents of social change and development.

**Keywords:** Development, diaspora, transnationalism, second generation

### **Introduction**

In the new millennium, the academic scholarship and research projects focusing on *the nexus of migration and development* (M&D henceforth) has proliferated, to the extent of being called the "new development mantra" (Rother 2009). The field seems to have emerged as an independent research field with scholars providing rich documentation, for instance, on the economic remittances sent towards the homeland via formal or informal channels of transfer (Page & Plaza 2006) or foreign direct investments by diaspora entrepreneurs (Newland & Tanaka 2010). Other forms of participation that scholars have focused upon in the frame of development studies include return migration as well as political and social remittances (Baser

and Toivanen, 2019; Brønden 2012; Faist 2008; Horst et al. 2010; Van Hear and Nyberg-Sørensen 2003). Gradually, diaspora diplomacy and development projects have become intertwined in the agendas of both home and host countries as well as international organizations that deal with aid and development in the Global South (Gonzalez 2010; Ho and MacConnell 2019).

Although the researched topics in M&D research significantly converge with those in more classical scholarship on migrant transnationalism, namely concerning economic, political and social remittances, and return migration, the M&D research seems to entail a strong policy-orientated approach. Partially related to this, the emphasis on different national spaces and contexts is also different between the two scholarships. While scholarship on transnationalism focuses on social spaces that extend beyond the nation-state borders, the tendency in M&D research has been firmly rooted in the perspective of the sending state to look at diasporas' contributions in the homeland context and the eventual impact such participation has on local economies and development processes. Most of the research focus on state-led initiatives either by home or host states and therefore, entrap the discussion revolving around M&D to a state-centric debate. In the latter, diasporas are also treated as “agents of change and development” in their homelands with less focus on what “diaspora” and “development” actually entail. This would mean discussing what constitutes “diaspora” and “development”, and how and where the latter takes place.

Delgado Wise and Marquez Covarrubias (2010: 144-145) posit that there is a clear disassociation between theories of development and of migration resulting to studies that do not capture the context in which “migrations - and the fundamental connections involving processes of global, national, regional or local development are inscribed”. Although there has been a minor “transnational turn” in M&D research (Faist 2008; Faist et al. 2011; Glick-Schiller & Faist 2010), we propose to push the conceptual debate a bit further in terms of problematizing the underlying nation-state centered approach in M&D research. We suggest taking diaspora members' transnational activities as a starting point, instead, for instance, of the measured impact such activities have on homeland development. This allows to capture such transnational practices that contribute towards development, yet that often remain invisible, particularly such activities by subsequent generations in the diaspora. This is exemplified with a discussion on second-generation members' transnational practices towards

their parents' societies of departure that can be approached as *development transactions*. This allows taking into consideration diaspora communities' heterogeneity, and relatedly the complexity of their members' practices, motivations and means to take part in development of the ancestral "homeland".

We will first provide a brief overview of the nexus of migration and development in research literature, then discuss how "diaspora" and "development" have been understood in M&D research and how the transnational frame can provide insights into diaspora members' and particularly their descendants' transnational practices and activities that have a clear development dimension.

### **Migration-development nexus**

Since the 1970s, different governmental instances, NGOs, civil society institutions, diaspora organizations and development agencies have increasingly recognized the potential of diaspora communities in development-related matters. For instance, at the national level, both the sending and the receiving states have taken notice of the implications migrants' cross-border connections can generate, be they economic, political or social. On the side of the sending states, local politicians have mobilized to create diaspora ministries and to formulate policies towards their over-seas members (Varadarajan 2010). An increasing number of states, both the receiving and the sending ones, exercise active diaspora policies, both to strengthen the already existing development policies and to better tap into the diaspora communities' economic, social and political resources (Kapur 2016; Nurse 2019; Londo 2020).

We will not trace back here the emergence of development and migration studies as ample literature on the topic has been previously published (Brønden 2012; Christou and Mavroudi 2015; de Haas 2006).<sup>i</sup> What is noteworthy though, is that the 1990s witnessed a drastic change in perceptions on the relationship between development and migration, with the latter viewed to fuel the development of the sending states, instead of hindering it. Also Glick Schiller and Faist (2010: 7-11) have argued that there has been a change from a migration development mantra to the migration development nexus, referring to the fact that migration and migrants are increasingly being viewed as potentially contributing to development instead of the

contrary. This has also been accompanied by a newly found enthusiasm in policymaking towards diaspora communities' role in homeland affairs. Diaspora's contribution to poverty reduction in the homeland (Van Hear et al. 2004), turning brain drain into brain gain (Groot & Gibbons 2007), and diasporas building peace via development projects (Budabin 2014) are just a few examples of numerous themes dealt with in the field of M&D studies.

One central theme in M&D research has been economic remittances: their significance to the national GDPs in developing countries has been widely documented (Page & Plaza 2006). Non-surprisingly, they have been referred to as "development aid", informal flows that are channelled towards the sending state (Gundel 2002). The focus on the significance of economic remittances to homeland development in the field is understandable, since such transnational activity and to some extent its impact in the sending country is measurable. Indeed, there has been a strong tendency in scholarship in M&D research to assess and measure the impact diaspora's participation generates towards homeland development - not the least due to the fact that the research field is strongly policy-orientated. However, an emphasis to produce applicable, policy-orientated research knowledge can lead to normative tendencies in terms of conceptual approaches and theoretical framing.

There is a constantly growing body of empirical case studies that are based on extensive fieldwork or textual analysis, but often without any quantitative approach that could capture more nuanced driving factors, implications or consequences of diaspora initiatives. Quantitative studies, instead, mostly tend to focus on financial remittances, excluding an analysis on the non-material aspects of remitting such as political and social contributions. Whereas the tendencies in M&D research has been to assess the impact of diasporas' engagement towards homeland development or to what extent the diaspora's role can be considered positive or negative, theoretical developments seem to be lagging behind the empirical work (see Christou & Mavroudi 2015; de Haas 2006). Hein de Haas (2010: 2) calls for more empirical work that is "designed to test theoretically derived hypotheses and, hence, to improve the generalized understanding of migration-development interactions." Within both qualitative and quantitative studies, "development" is often employed as an umbrella-term that seems to refer to all sorts of transnational flows of material (economic, social or other) or intellectual capital (know-how, skills, expertise) towards the sending region, (temporal) return migration and participation in post-conflict reconstruction.

Yet more rarely the conceptual assumptions underlining terms such as “development” and “diaspora” are opened for conceptual discussion. Brinkerhoff (2016: 4) suggests that policymaker perspectives on the potential for diasporas to promote development are largely bimodal; meaning some believe that diasporas have almost no impact while others exaggerate the impressive volume of remittances and endorse rhetoric. As she suggests, what is needed is a more nuanced understanding of diaspora interventions in development. For instance, not all migrants, who send remittances, migrate to Global North, but such development transactions also take place between diaspora communities located in the global South (Rother 2009; Crush & Caesar 2016). Another assumption related to this seems to have been that while migrants reside in what are referred to as modern and developed countries, they develop skills and embed the “liberal values” in their transnational identity (Rother 2009), thus underlining a certain tendency to essentialize the “diaspora” and to understand development in a Euro-centric manner. Also, “diaspora” is often understood in terms of the first generation of migrants, whereas less attention is paid on the subsequent generations.

### **“Diaspora” and “development” in M&D research**

#### ***What diaspora?***

The questions often approached by policymakers or the policy-oriented scholars revolve around “which diaspora groups to approach” and “how to make them agents for development” as well as “how these diaspora groups can act as a bridge between the homeland actors and international donors”. How “diaspora” is understood remains often undefined, and it has been suggested by Sinatti and Horst (2014) that the diaspora has often been taken as a unitary and homogeneous actor engaging in development that allegedly takes place in one specific place, the sending state. Also, Page and Mercer (2012: 2) observe that: “A diaspora development policy seeks to influence what this discursive subject does with their money, time and words. Crudely, the ultimate policy goal is to think about how governments, businesses and NGOs (in the Global North and South) can ‘improve’ diasporic ‘behaviour’” (see Zanfrini 2015: 2). This can lead to biased assumptions of diaspora’s engagement, and of diaspora itself.

This tendency to treat “diaspora” as a unitary and homogeneous actor is visible in debates concerning the motivations diasporas have to participate in homeland development and what impact such participation generates. For instance, within the structuralist frame, diaspora groups’ participation towards homeland has been dealt with as a sign of lack of integration and/or yet a lingering emotional attachment to and identification with the homeland (see de Haas 2010). Diasporas are often seen allegedly having positive and altruistic reasons to participate in homeland development, and there is an underlying tendency to explicate diaspora members’ motivations to participate in homeland development as a manifestation of lingering loyalties and attachments.

Bréant (2003) also observes that “migrants become the objects of all expectations”, both from the host land in terms of integration and homeland in terms of responsibility to contribute to development. Such political imperatives can become internalized by diaspora members themselves and manifest in a sense of duty to contribute towards homeland development. Yet, political imperatives and personal reasons to participate in “homeland” development may be quite different for migrants’ descendants compared to their parents. Therefore, engaging in development transactions, political, economic or other, should not automatically be interpreted as expressions of ethnic identity nor as identification with the “imagined homeland”, as there is a danger of essentialising the diaspora (Toivanen 2021). Instead, diaspora members’ motivations and capacities to participate to homeland development are shaped by age, generation, gender, social class, political and religious affiliations and embeddedness in related networks, and by more contextually specific factors, such as existing transnational networks and host society opportunity structures.

Moreover, diasporas are formed of several migratory flows and of migrants who leave the homeland for a variety of reasons including ideological, political, social and economic motivations. In mainstream discussions, diasporas are treated as one group with a single united aim and aspects such as class, gender and generation, for instance, are often missing. Essentialising “diaspora” as a unitary and homogeneous actor prevents seeing diasporas as highly heterogeneous and fractured and to understand why and how certain members of diasporic movements engage in development transactions, while others do not. This also means acknowledging that diaspora members, for instance belonging to different generations, may have diverse skills and resources at their disposition to engage in such transactions. Another

important aspect to mention is the continued trend of centring such research and discussions on diaspora organizations' activities rather than nonconventional ways of social, political and economic remitting to the homeland. As Glick-Schiller (2013) has warned in the past, this fetishism of focusing solely on the organizational behaviour leads to incomplete research results and underreported potential of diaspora members who chose not be part of an organization that can get involved in contracted activities with the host or homeland actors.

Therefore, we suggest taking actions, practices and agency of individuals who belong to diaspora communities as a starting point, instead the diaspora community itself or the impact such actions might have. This means acknowledging that diaspora members do not automatically share the same possibilities, means, motivations and interests to take part in such transactions. It also allows problematizing the place-centredness in the understandings of development and to grasp transactions that can remain invisible, for instance, if they take place via informal channels or other than diaspora organisations. We will return to this point after the following discussion on "development".

### ***Where is development?***

As Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) argue in their paper on *methodological nationalism*, the nation-state-centeredness approaches to migration in social sciences have limited our analytical capacities and shaped our conceptualization of migration-related phenomena. In a similar venue, there is a risk of essentialising concepts and stripping them of their analytical edge when they are operationalized on the basis of more nation-state-based, policy-orientated terminology. Glick-Schiller (2009: 14) further suggests that "current discourses about migration and development reflect a profound methodological nationalism that distorts present-day migration studies". Indeed, the field of M&D research seems to entail a certain emphasis on place-centeredness when approaching "development" (as well as migration) taking place in a particular, geographically defined national space(s).

This relates to our earlier observations on "diaspora", as the risk of treating diasporas as unitary actors that engage in development transactions between the receiving and the sending society (instead in the transnational space) also enables to sediment the understanding of development

as taking place in one specific (national) context. This is not surprising as such as development policies are drafted, implemented and designed within a national space that is usually defined with clear-cut geographical boundaries. The implementation of development policies is readily seen to happen within the institutional and political structures of a nation-state, which leads to the tendency to confine the understanding of migration and development nexus within a nation-state frame - as one between the sending and the receiving state.

Indeed, Sinatti and Horst (2014) argue that in current debates on development and migration diaspora's involvement in homeland development is often rationalized through an essentialized understanding of belonging towards "homeland" that is considered to precede and condition diaspora members' involvement and identifications with co-nationals. According to them, a similar kind of understanding underpins the latest focus on return migration that is approached with the understanding that migrants' belonging is rooted to the "ancestral, unchanging place – and only such place." (Sinatti & Horst 2014: 14). The authors warn against similar kind of essentialism when questioning the reasons for diaspora communities to engage in development: "By proposing essentialized understandings of ethnicity and belonging, diaspora–engagement discourse generates over-simplistic expectations about why and where diaspora groups engage in development." (Sinatti & Horst 2014: 14).

There is a need to critically reflect upon the implicit nation-state centerdness in understandings of where and how development, and the related transactions that contribute towards it take place. However, this does not mean signing off the national context altogether. For instance, Faist (2008: 21) notes that it is states that structure "the transnational spaces in which non-state actors are engaged in cross-border flows, leading towards a tight linkage between migration control, immigrant incorporation and development cooperation" (see de Haas 2010). One example of this is how migratory policies, for instance in form of temporary residence permits, shape migrants' occupational condition and therefore their capabilities to contribute towards homeland development (Zanfrini 2015). Also, how diaspora members' transnational participation is welcomed (if it is at all) and conditioned depend on sending state policies towards diaspora and the communities within (Baser 2015).

Development is often seen as taking place in the sending country by a uniform benevolent actor that is assumedly the diaspora. However, if we are to consider the heterogeneity of different



diaspora communities, and their individual members' embeddedness in multiple transnational, national and local networks, associative structures, or yet in intimate family and personal networks, we also need to ask *where* exactly does development, and the related transactions take place. The in/voluntary mobility of individuals, who engage in development transactions, is one factor that problematizes the centrality of place when speaking of development. This has been to some extent discussed in previous research literature concerning temporal or more permanent return movements or circular migration (Zanfrini 2015: 10-11). Another factor is the emergence of virtual spaces via which development transactions (in form of knowledge and skills transfer) take place as well. Analysing actions, practices and activities in the transnational social spaces (Faist et al. 2011; Glick Schiller and Faist 2010) provides a better understanding of the myriad of ways how, why and where different diaspora members engage in activities that contribute towards development - without nevertheless disregarding the significance of the local or national context.

### **Transnational frame in M&D research**

In migration scholarship, there is a long tradition to focus on diaspora communities' ties and participation between the sending and the receiving state. Starting from the 1990s, such studies have increasingly employed the transnational frame to conceptualize various processes related to migration. Putting emphasis on migrants' cross-border ties and connections, scholars have argued in favour of adopting a transnational frame to better understand international migration (Vertovec 2009). Transnational studies emerged as a response to approaches that were deemed too nation-state-centered and that were suggested to blind scholars to cross-border processes in relation to migration (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller 2002).

One of the most known conceptualisations is that of Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1992: 1), who defined transnationalism as "processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement". Increasingly since the 1990s, scholars have elaborated conceptual approaches to better understand migrant transnationalism. They have focused on "transnationalism from above" (migrant communities' social organization, diaspora policies, economic remittances) as well as on 'transnationalism from below' (experiences, identity, attachments) (see Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Glick Schiller

& Levitt 2004; Smith & Guarnizo 1998). On the other hand, different types and classifications of transnational activities and engagements, including economic, political, cultural and other, have been developed to better understand such activities (Vertovec 2009).

We argue that the field of M&D studies can benefit in conceptual insights from migration theories related to transnationalism. There has been, what could be called a “minor transnational turn” (Faist et al. 2011; Glick-Schiller & Faist 2010) in M&D literature, with two distinguishable tendencies (Delgado-Wise 2014). The first major viewpoint in how development has been explored from a transnational perspective is on transnational economic remittances and their impact on the sending states’ local economies. Similarly, Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011) suggest that “a lion’s share of the research on migration and development focuses on how economic remittances affect social outcomes”. They argue that scholars also need to pay attention to social remittances, referring to Levitt’s (1998: 926) conceptualization of the term as “the ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities” that can play a role in changing the political and social life in the sending country. Levitt and Lamba-Niever (2011: 4) have revisited such conceptualization of social remittances and discuss it in the context of homeland development. They suggest that not only “the outcomes of these social and economic transfers are mixed”, but also that little research exists on the collective use of social remittances and their impact to organizational life and community development.

The second major viewpoint in the field of M&D studies has been the role migrant organizations play in local development processes, particularly on how diasporas participate in social works (Delgado-Wise 2014). For instance, Faist (2008: 27) suggests that migrants and transnational collective actors, such as “transnational families, hometown associations, epistemic communities of experts and scientists, cross-border religious congregations as well as ethnic and even national communities”, have become to be constituted by states and international organizations as “transnational development agents”. Faist (2008: 21) also conceptualizes such collective actors as operating in a transnational space that refers to “sustained and continuous pluri-local transactions crossing state-borders”. The focus in M&D studies, however, seems to have been rather in collective than on individual actors.

Defining transnational collective actors' transactions as bounded communications between three people in minimum (Faist 2008: 23), we also suggest including a focus on transactions between an individual and collective actor(s) (for instance, an association in the sending country), or between two individuals (belonging to a diaspora community in the same or different society of settlement and/or in the receiving country). In this, we draw from the definition provided by Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1992: 1) on "transmigrants" as individuals, who: 'develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders" but also as actors who "make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously".

In other words, such transactions can be undertaken by individual actors, who create and foster multiple transnational relations, make decisions and take upon development transactions in the transnational space they are embedded in. Such actors can be individuals, who have arrived as part of diaspora movements to the receiving society or belong to the subsequent generations, and who foster transactions with collective actor(s) in the sending country, or transactions between two individual actors, not necessarily located in the receiving and the sending country. By including a focus on the transnational space, also allows capturing the circulatory movement that individual actors can take part in and to go beyond the global North/South dichotomy in terms of sending and receiving countries (see Zanfrini 2015: 10-11).

Furthermore, such space is not merely characterized by institutionalized and formal networks, but also by informal and, for instance, online-based networks that can be employed to engage in development transactions by individual members of diaspora movements (Brinkerhoff 2004). One example of such development transactions is provided by (online) knowledge exchange between scientists and experts that are not necessarily structured, but that could be characterized as individual initiatives (Biao 2005). By focalizing on individuals' agency in transnational development transactions, we not only get a better sense of the multiplicity of ways to engage in development transactions, but also of the motivations to take part in them. We will illustrate this in the following sections that defines development transactions and discusses second generation in the context of M&D research.

*Understanding development transactions*

What sort of transnational activities undertaken by individual and collective actors that are part of diasporic movements could be understood as being development transactions? Indeed, it would be lopsided to assume that all transnational activities automatically contribute to development, nor that all such activities contribute in a positive manner. As discussed above, the centrality of the place, most often of the geographically defined space of the nation-state, bears upon the conceptualizations of “development” and “diaspora”. Indeed, Sinatti & Horst (2014: 15) argue for a reconceptualization of “development”:

...as a process of social change that is linked to human mobility across a range of socio-spatial levels, and of diaspora as a mobilizing tool and an imagined, as opposed to an actual community.

Sinatti and Horst (2014: 15) put *social change* at the core of defining development. Defining development as something that takes place in and happens to one particular place, most often seen as happening in/to a developing country, resonates also in Amartya Sen’s (1999) understanding of development, as articulated in his book *Development as Freedom*. Hein de Haas (2007: 34) further builds on Sen’s understanding by stating that:

... development by conceiving it as the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. In order to operationalize these ‘freedoms’, Sen used the concept of human capability, which relates to the ability of humans being to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance their substantive choices.

“Development”, in this context, can therefore be broadly understood in terms of freedoms, which can be increased by enhancing human capabilities to lead their lives as they wish, and development transactions as a process of social change that leads to such possibilities. Such definition does not overemphasize the economic dimension of development, nor de-emphasize the social and human aspects of development. Furthermore, it does not lean on nation-state centered approach to development as happening within a particular nation-state and by a diaspora that would act out of loyalty and feelings of belonging. Development is viewed as

having to do more with people than with places, or as Sinatti and Horst (2014: 15) suggest that development might instead be about “creating better conditions for people rather than for places”.

In other words, such transnational activities and engagements can include political, economic *and* social remittances - and more often than not - the combination of them that aim to promote the improvement of local communities and their members’ lives. With the understanding of development as outlined above, transnational activities that contribute towards the development of the sending region/state can include a wide range of activities, in forms of political, economic and/or social remittances – depending also on how they are interpreted by different actors. For instance, fund-raising in the receiving country to support minority groups’ civil rights in the sending country can be considered capacity-building and supporting the local civil society, or alternatively a political act by the local government in the sending country (Cochrane et al. 2009).

Political, economic and social transnational activities can be argued to include the dimension of development, in a more or less explicit manner, particularly if they are esteemed to enhance the human capabilities of local communities and their members. Such remittances can be, for instance, lobbying for human right-related causes that relate to the “homeland”, providing logistical support in times of political disturbance, engaging in online activism such as in blogging and campaigns to raise awareness, participating in humanitarian and other projects that entail a clear development dimension, making donations to local NGOs or other actors that promote development, engaging in cultural production in the sending country and so forth. In that sense, diaspora members’ transnational activities that contribute towards and increase the ability of local communities and their members to lead dignified lives can be characterized as development transactions.

### ***Second generation and development***

Previously, little attention has been paid to the second generation in M&D literature: the focus has been implicitly on the first-generation migrants, whereas the members of the second generation and their transnational participation towards the development of the sending country

have received considerably less attention. This is surprising as such, since the means, motivations and possibilities to engage in “homeland” development can be quite different from those of the first generation. On the other hand, in migration scholarship, the literature on second-generation transnationalism deals often with second-generation members’ social, cultural, familial or yet economic ties to their parents’ homeland. Although second-generations’ political participation in critical periods in the homeland has been widely studied (Hess and Korf 2014; Baser 2015; Muller-Funk 2020), there are fewer instances where the second generation’s participation is approached and framed in terms of development (Toivanen 2021; Toivanen & Baser 2020; Bond 2015; Beauchemin et al. 2010).

Indeed, few studies have discussed second-generation members’ engagements in transnational activities and practices towards their parents’ societies of departure within the frame of development. For instance, Bond (2015: 19), a UK membership body working for over 440 organizations found out in their study that different generations have different views about development. The report stated that the subsequent generations described their countries of ancestry as “places full of potential and opportunity for investment and innovation, and development as dynamic, positive process that can enable them to build relationships with international communities”. This is backed by empirical studies conducted within the transnational scholarship. For instance, Santelli and colleagues’ study on second-generation Algerians in France (1999) show that investment opportunities can motivate the sustaining of transnational ties to homeland without such activities necessarily being rooted to lingering attachments and loyalties towards the homeland.

Also, Fokkema and colleagues (2013) have shown that second-generation members, whose parents came from Morocco, Former Yugoslavia and Turkey engage in sending economic remittances to their parents’ societies of departure for two main reasons. The first is for emotional attachments that they foster towards their parents’ countries of origin, and the second for reasons of self-interest, for instance to ensure the managing of their investments and material assets in the case of “return”. Whereas in some cases the motivations to take part in “homeland” development seem linked to identity-related reasons (Toivanen 2021), the motivations to engage can be very varied (Bond 2015). Transnational engagements cannot be taken as a mere reflection of feeling of belonging, but that they can also have a strategic and practical dimension.

On the other hand, second-generation transnational initiatives with development aims do not take place via official or formal channels and networks at all (Toivanen 2021). Second-generation members can also be involved in “homeland” affairs via other ethnic or non-ethnic organisations, and not only in their societies of birth, but also with other second-generation members born in Europe (Toivanen 2021). For instance, Bond (2015) report also interestingly noted that the majority of the interviewed second, third and fourth-generation members in the UK did not understand the term “diaspora”, nor did they identify themselves as belonging to a “diaspora”.

In M&D studies, diasporas seem often to be approached as collective actors, with organizations, networks or yet families being focalized upon as the central development agents. What is more challenging to discern is the agency of individual diaspora members in terms of development transactions that do not necessarily take place in the context of hometown associations or any formal organizational structures of diaspora networks (Mazzucato & Kabki 2009). For instance, Brinkerhoff (2016: 6) argues that current analyses “do not account for the possibility of diaspora entrepreneurial actors who, themselves, initiate and pursue change in the country of origin”. This can mean that diaspora members take part in development transactions via non-ethnic organizations, host society’s development agencies or on an individual basis without any involvement from behalf of their families, for instance by setting up an online knowledge network. Indeed, “some diaspora impacts are products of uncoordinated collective efforts, making it sometimes difficult to trace back to diaspora” (Brinkerhoff 2016: 6). This raises questions on to what extent subsequent generations’ transnational activities that contribute towards “homeland” development go under radar in current research.

To conclude, we posit that the transnational frame allows better capturing transversal relations and activities that the different diasporic actors in different societies of settlement foster between themselves, instead of only considering the homeland-diaspora connections. Acknowledging the heterogeneity (and divisions) that exists within diaspora communities, as well as the similarities that exist between different factions of the such communities across national borders enables a more informed analysis on individual-level motivations, interests, challenges and means to engage in development transactions. In this sense, we feel it essential

to emphasize the agency of not only the collective transnational actors, but also the individual ones and how they interact with collective actors.

## **Conclusion**

Building on the conceptualization of migrant transnationalism (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992; Levitt 1998; Wimmer & Glick-Schiller 2002) and on the more recent transnational turn in M&D studies (Faist et al. 2011; Glick-Schiller & Faist 2010), we have suggested that there is a need for a critical discussion from a de-nationalising perspective as to what constitutes “development” and “diaspora” in M&D research. To this effect, we have argued that the transnational frame allows problematizing the centrality of place (and of the nation-state) in M&D research by taking diaspora members’ activities as a starting-point – instead of the measured impact such activities have on homeland development. This also problematizes the understanding of diaspora as a national community whose motivations to contribute towards homeland development are rooted to feelings of alleged national belonging or as one that only consists of first-generation migrants. We have discussed the conceptual possibilities this opens, particularly in terms of understanding the subsequent generations’ engagements towards the ancestral homeland.

We have referred to transnational activities that include a development dimension as development transactions – emphasizing that they have the potential to generate social change in the homeland context by enhancing local communities’ and their members capabilities to lead dignified lives. Such approach allows providing significant conceptual insights into cross-border social processes and practices, circulatory mobility patterns and agency in terms of diaspora members’ and their descendants’ engagement in homeland development. To conclude, we suggest that by focusing on development transactions, we can better understand the complexity of diaspora members’ practices, motivations and means to take part in development of the ancestral “homeland”, including beyond the first generation. Overall, this offers a better understanding of how diasporas operate as transnational agents towards social change and development.



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<sup>i</sup> See also two recently published special issues on the topic:

1. Special Issue: Migration and Development Buzz? Rethinking the Migration Development Nexus and Policies, *International Migration*, June 2012, vol. 50, issue 3, (ed. Brønden, BM).
2. Special Issue: Migration, Development and the 'Migration and Development Nexus', published by *Population, Space and Place*, July/August 2013, vol. 19, issue 4 (eds. Geiger, M & Pécoud, A).