

## The Social Progress Index in International Business Site Selection: Three Case Studies

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### Introduction

International businesses face a difficult task when trying to decide where to place or expand a business that could be located anywhere in the world. Each country is a complex system of human capabilities, technical systems, [infrastructure bases, laws, cultures and economic systems. How can a company know which country is best for it today, and even more importantly, which country will grow into an appropriate location for future business opportunities?

Several studies offer insights into how to make site selection decisions (O'Farrell & Wood, 1994; Papadopoulos et al., 2002; Rothaermel et al., 2006) but the complexity of the data required makes initial analysis across many countries problematic. Most businesses, trying to predict an ideal country or sequence of countries to enter, are left to simple rules of thumb or decision models using limited criteria (Górecka & Szalucka, 2013; Alexander et al., 2011). A wide variety of country data of varying reliability and efficacy are frequently used (Rahman, 2003). Many of the largest companies have developed specialized teams with sophisticated models for site selection. However, for smaller companies finding reliable, consistently measured data they can interpret and analyze in ways that provide useful insights is a challenge.

### Literature Review

The Social Progress Index was launched in April 2013 at the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Skoll World Forum held at the University of Oxford (The Origins, 2015). Research has shown that wealth in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and economic

social success do not always equate with high social progress (Rogers, 2015; Social Progress Imperative, 2015). The Social Progress Index is unique because it is the most comprehensive framework developed for measuring social progress and the first to measure social progress independently of GDP or other economic variables (Porter, 2015; Keohane, 2015). For instance, the Social Progress Index uses rigorous statistical techniques and data from internationally recognized sources like the World Bank and the World Health Organization but does not include GDP (PRNewswire, 2013). Although GDP has been the benchmark for guiding economic development for more than a half-century, the Social Progress Index is intended to complement (not replace) it as a core metric of national performance (Porter, 2015).

The data used by the Social Progress Index measures multiple dimensions of social progress within countries meant to help them promote greater human wellbeing (Social Progress Index, 2015). The 2015 Social Progress Index included data from 133 countries and partial data from 28 countries, which means 99 percent of the world's population was covered (Social Index Findings, 2015; Levi, 2015). Instead of using abstract measures, the Social Progress Index data-driven scores allow performance between peer countries to be tracked, scaled, and compared (Social Index Findings, 2015).

Porter (2015) explained that a country's social performance is based on 52 indicators, which can be used as a practical tool by government and business leaders to benchmark performance and identify areas that have the greatest need for social improvement. According to Keohane (2015), the Social Progress Index social and environmental

indicators offer a holistic snapshot of the health of societies across the world.

The Social Progress Index score includes three dimensions referred to as Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing, and Opportunity (Social Index Findings, 2015). Each dimension is comprised of four equally-weighted individual components that are scored objectively from 0 to 100 where higher scores indicate higher social progress, and lower the reverse (Social Index Findings, 2015). The first dimension, Basic Human Needs, includes nutrition and basic medical care, water and sanitation, shelter, and personal safety; the second dimension, Foundations of Wellbeing, includes access to basic knowledge, access to information and communication, health and wellness, and ecosystem sustainability; and the final dimension, Opportunity, includes personal rights, personal freedom and choice, tolerance and inclusion, and access to advanced education (Rogers, 2015; Levi, 2015; Trumbull, 2014).

Recently work done by Deloitte has shown a connection between social progress and Foreign Direct Investment (Social Progress Imperative, 2015). “While the economic benefits of Foreign Direct Investment inflows are well understood, the contribution of Foreign Direct Investment to social progress is less clear cut,” said Steve Almond, Deloitte Global Chairman (Deloitte Press Release, 2015). Almond believes the Social Progress Index can help businesses and other organizations make better strategic investments and that governmental policies focused on driving social progress can attract Foreign Direct Investment (Deloitte Press Release, 2015)

As noted, one of the biggest advantages of the Social Progress Index is that it uses publicly available data that is widely reviewed and critiqued. That allows a company to not only see the indexes overall finding but to also look into individual components and apply those to its business model to determine which markets and sites best meet their future needs. Although the Social Progress Index is built entirely from already public data, its compilation of that data and distribution of it into three dimensions provides country selection decision makers added insight into how a country is progressing and its people are being served. These insights combined with a strategic understanding of the company are often the core components of the site selection process.

This paper provides three case studies to show how the Social Progress Index can be used in company site selection. As you will see in the three cases, each company has different goals and needs, yet the data from the Social Progress Index can be instrumental in helping the company build a site selection analysis that goes well beyond the basic GDP and population demographic numbers that many companies fall back on. It is not this papers intent to show every way in which the Social Progress Index can be used in site selection but to demonstrate the added value of the Social Progress Index and suggest approaches to its use in site selection.

## The Cases

Three cases have been chosen to demonstrate the usefulness of the Social Progress Index for site selection in three very different circumstances. One case each is provided for a company in the software industry, furniture industry and consumer products industry. Using three companies, from three different industries with widely different reasons for going international, demonstrates the flexibility of the Social Progress Index in site selection.

### Software Industry Case

Software is one of the most demanding, rapidly changing, and technically challenging industries making market selection for software firms a particular challenge (Ojala & Tyrvinen, 2008). Since software development can be performed anywhere there is reasonably consistent power, internet connections and a ready supply of college graduates, software can be developed almost anywhere in the world (Drucker, 2003).

The factors that most affect software firms' location selection criteria include: Infrastructure, Geographic Distance from Home Market, Economic Risk, Political Risk, Government Regulations, Cultural Similarity, Labour Force Skills and Costs, Resource Related Costs and Network Related Linkages (Abbott & Jones, 2012). While the list of factors is very similar to most industries, the intense time-based competition and wide variety of potential locations for software firms make selection of location for software companies particularly challenging.

The difficulty of market selection for software firms is particularly pronounced for small software firms. Although many have advanced data analysis skills, they often lack the international experience needed to generate and understand all the variables typically included in an international site selection (Moen & Endresen, 2004).

A typical small software firm such as Aginity, an Evanston, Illinois-based firm that outsources much of its coding overseas, is often left to chance relationships and accidentally gained knowledge to make important site selection decisions (Armour, 2007). But analysis of data from the Social Progress Index can help organize and simplify the process.

The first step in the site selection process is understanding the company's strategic needs. Analysis of public statements by Aginity executives shows that their primary goals for outsourcing were:

- 1) to lower coding costs through lower cost, skilled programmers,
- 2) to locate programmers with enough sense of personal liberty that they would be willing to make and defend creative decisions, and
- 3) a site with sufficient infrastructure to allow regular use of groupware across countries (Armour, 2007).

Looking at the overall Social Progress Index score would tell Aginity little that is useful about which country to select for outsourcing. However, the secondary level scores and the raw data scores provide almost all the information needed to complete an initial analysis in one easy to read table.

To meet outsourcing goal one (lower coding costs through lower cost, skilled programmers), Aginity would need a country with low labor costs but high levels of tertiary education achievement. The Level of Access to Advanced Education is one of the Social Progress Index components in its Opportunity dimension. The Level of Access to Advanced Education component combines measures of the quality of a country's higher education institutes with measures of access to those institutes making it a good combined measure of overall higher education outcomes in a country. The Social Progress Index does not include wage or income information on countries. Industry by country data would be critical to acquire for a final analysis and decision but for early sorting a rough estimate is good enough to give a general

idea of suitable countries. GDP per capita is a far from perfect estimator of wages because it includes the entire population, instead of just the employed, and has many other challenges as a predictor of wages, especially for just one industry. That said, comparable worldwide wage data is very difficult to come by. For early analysis, GDP per capita is an acceptable measure to rule out obvious bad choices or bring attention to good choices that one may not have otherwise considered.

To determine which countries would best help Aginity meet goal one, they could combine the SPI Access to Advanced Education measure with GDP per capita to determine which countries provide the best educational access with low GDP per capita. We converted the 2015 GDP per capita data to country rankings so it would be on a comparable scale with the Access to Advanced Education data. We ranked the highest GDP per capita country, Kuwait, as number one and the lowest, Central African Republic as 133. We then multiplied each country's 2015 education score by its GDP rank. The combined scores created a list of countries with high Access to Advanced Education but lower wages. Table 1 shows the results.

*Table 1: Countries with Best Access to Advanced Education with Low Wages*

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65	Ukraine
53	Kyrgyzstan
51	Uzbekistan
50	Moldova
48	Tajikistan
46	Philippines

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It probably does not surprise many people that former Soviet countries are well represented at the top of the list. Some of the specific countries may be a surprise, however. Not many think of Moldova or Tajikistan when looking for software outsourcing, but based on these results more companies probably should. It is also interesting to note the Ukraine is the top of the list since Aginity eventually chose the Ukraine as its primary outsourcing country and the relationship has worked well.

Aginity's second strategic goal for outsourcing was to locate programmers with enough sense of personal liberty that they would be willing to make and defend creative

decisions. The Social Progress Index includes Personal Rights as one of its components under the Opportunity dimension. Personal Rights includes scores for political rights, freedom of speech and other institutions that are instrumental to making people feel safe in expressing their opinions. High scores on personal rights tend to skew heavily towards wealthy countries with high wages. Given goal one, we wanted to find countries that scored well in goal one and personal rights for goal two.

We therefore multiplied the scores we developed for goal one with the Personal Rights score from the SPI to get a score that combined Good Education, Low Wages and Personal Freedoms. The results of the top countries can be seen in Table 2.

*Table 2: Countries with Best Access to Education, Low Wages and Personal Rights*

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36	Ukraine
31	Jamaica
28	Philippines
26	Mongolia
24	Costa Rica
24	Moldova

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When personal rights were added to the mix, many of the former Soviet countries fell from the list of top contenders but interestingly the Ukraine remained at the top of the list. The Philippines and Moldova also continued to do well. New countries on the list, like Jamaica and Mongolia, are probably a major surprise to most companies in the software industry but they may warrant more consideration.

The third and final major strategic concern for Aginity in choosing an outsourcing country was a site with sufficient infrastructure to allow regular use of groupware across countries. Under the Foundations of Wellbeing dimension, the Social Progress Index includes a component for Access to Information and Communications. It includes some raw components that may not be directly required for this strategic goal but they probably add more to understanding a country's internet infrastructure than a raw score such as percent of internet users in the country. Since information infrastructure strengths are heavily skewed towards wealthier countries, it was decided that factor strategic goal three should be considered in relation to the findings

from the other two goals. SPI Access to Information and Communications was thus multiplied by the scores from goal one and two to derive an overall analysis of countries that best fit Aginity's strategic goals. The results are shown in table 3.

*Table 3: Combined Access to Education, Wages, Personal Freedom and Access to Information and Communications*

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257	Ukraine
247	Jamaica
198	Costa Rica
190	Philippines
185	Moldova
175	South Africa
173	Mongolia
173	Estonia
170	Chile
156	Georgia

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As shown in Table 3, the Ukraine remained the top choice for Aginity's outsourcing given their goals, which are common among small software firms. Aginity's executives claim that it was existing personal relationships that drew them to make the Ukraine their outsourcing selection (Amour, 2007). If so, they were very lucky and the success of their outsourcing may have more to do with that luck than they know.

Of the other countries that rise to the top of this analysis, many are not a surprise, but a few are. Although the Philippines and Estonia have long been the focus of outsourcing, it seems like Costa Rica is becoming a contender. Although very little is heard about Jamaica or Mongolia in software, this analysis suggests they should be given a closer look.

### **Furniture Industry Case**

The furniture industry makes an excellent contrast to the software industry because it is in many ways its polar opposite (Gordon et al., 2007). Where the software industry is driven by extreme needs for rapid adaptation and nearly instantaneous product distribution the furniture industry is driven more by traditional styles and the manufacture and transportation of large, heavy goods. The furniture industry thus has

very different outsourcing needs from those in the software industry.

The factors driving factory location in the furniture industry include low cost labor, efficient communications, access to hardwoods and investment capital, and worker productivity (Gazo & Quesada, 2005).

Many of the small brands in the furniture industry have been internationalized due to acquisition by larger multinational companies. For example Lacquer Craft has grown from a Chinese contract manufacturer to the owner of many extendable brands it purchased overseas (Mao, Li, & Lui, 2015). As their labor costs climb in China they are now faced with the question of where to manufacture their many product lines. Key criteria for site selection should include:

- 1) good basic education for low cost workers,
- 2) affordable support infrastructure for workers, and
- 3) access to needed natural resources.

Even though the software industry and furniture industry are very different, we again find the Social Progress Index contains almost all the information needed for an initial site selection analysis. As was noted in the software industry case, the Social Progress Index doesn't include wage data, so the same GDP per capita data is added for analyzing the furniture industry.

To analyze goal one for a furniture company, the Social Progress Index includes a component called Access to Basic Knowledge, under the dimension Foundations of Wellbeing, which includes factors such as the adult literacy rate, and primary and secondary school enrollment rates. It is a solid indicator of whether or not workers will have the basic skill levels needed to be trained in furniture manufacturing. Analysis of the first goal therefore is as simple as multiplying the Access to Basic Knowledge score by our GDP per capita rank. Table 4 shows the top ten countries from that analysis.

*Table 4: Countries with Best Access to Basic Knowledge with Low Wages*

Tajikistan	103
Myanmar	100
Kyrgyzstan	98
Nepal	95

Moldova	91
Uzbekistan	90
Honduras	86
Ukraine	85
Rwanda	84
Malawi	84

As occurred with the software industry analysis, many of these countries are already popular for furniture manufacturing. However, several are not for reasons that will become clear as we analyze the other strategic factors important to furniture companies.

The second important factor for furniture manufacturing is an affordable support infrastructure for workers. If workers cannot get reasonable access to housing and the other necessities of life, it will be difficult to maintain a successful workforce. One of the three high-level dimensions in the Social Progress Index is Basic Human Needs. It covers a wide variety of the basics such as housing and personal safety. To determine which countries that did well in the first level analysis also provide workers basic needs well, we multiplied the scores from our analysis of Access to Basic Knowledge and GDP per capita by the Social Progress Index dimension Basic Human Needs score. Results are shown in Table 5.

*Table 5: Countries with Best Access to Basic Knowledge, Low Wages and Fulfilled Basic Human Needs*

Uzbekistan	72
Moldova	71
Kyrgyzstan	67
Ukraine	67
Armenia	65
Tajikistan	65
Georgia	62
Bosnia and Herzegovina	61
Cuba	60
Nepal	60

Here we see many countries from the former Soviet sphere. Even though they have maintained support for basic human needs, the income suppression from the Soviet era continues to live on. That makes many of them

prime candidates for manufacturing heavy goods such as furniture.

Finally, the third strategic goal specified was access to natural resources. The Social Progress Index does not have any uniquely derived scores for natural environment that do not include items such as carbon emissions, which may not be a major concern for furniture manufacturers. Under the dimension Foundations of Well Being, the Social Progress Index does include a Biodiversity raw score taken from other sources that does fulfill our need for a measure of natural resources. We therefore multiplied the Biodiversity score by our results from strategic goal two to derive a final ranking of countries for furniture manufacturing (Table 6).

*Table 6: Combined Access to Basic Knowledge, Wages, Basic Human Needs and Biodiversity*

Armenia	52
Serbia	52
Nicaragua	49
Jamaica	47
Ecuador	46
Bolivia	44
Honduras	43
Costa Rica	43
Laos	40
Nepal	37

Interestingly, three of the countries that already produce large quantities of wood furniture, Sri Lanka, Philippines, and Indonesia came out as numbers 11, 12, and 13 respectively in the analysis. All of the countries listed export some furniture but not all are as big in furniture exports as this analysis suggests they might become.

It is important to note that this analysis is not able to consider transportation cost because that requires knowledge of where the products will be sold. Given the weight and bulk of furniture, transportation cost must be considered in deciding where to manufacture it. Transportation cost explains why Canada and Mexico rate number one and two in exports of furniture to the US even though they are way down on this list. Transportation costs can be easily added, however, by adding it as another factor just as GDP per capita was.

## Consumer Products Industry Case

Consumer products make a good middle case between the poles of the software and furniture industries because the manufacture of these products are often in the middle of the complexity spectrum for manufacturing and also because most consumer products companies are interested in selling their products in overseas markets, not just producing them there. That adds the additional complexity of not only choosing where to make your products but also which country makes a good market for sales.

Choosing a market for sales is inherently more challenging than choosing one for production. With production, the entire focus can be on getting the desired level of quality for the best price but with sales, many more factors come into the equation. You need to consider your price position in the market, your brand image, cultural fit, distribution channels and many other company and brand specific factors. That makes choosing countries for expansion of sales far more dependent on company strategy. Therefore, most companies use a two-step process for analyzing new markets. They first evaluate market size attractiveness, then evaluate structural and strategic factors among markets that fit their size criteria (Rahman, 2003).

Even with the far greater complexity of choosing a market for sales, the Social Progress Index has much to offer in evaluating potential markets. For example, consider Lilleborg AS, a Norwegian soap company that dominates the dishwashing soap market in Norway with its Sun and Zalo brands but has thus far only exported products outside Norway. If it were to decide to try and break beyond its export strategy, it would face a complex choice of where to begin. Following a two-step analysis process for finding an appropriate market fit makes sense.

The first step is choosing a market with an appropriate size that can support both product manufacturing and sales. Lilleborg would need to consider what size plant it is comfortable operating and how quickly it could extend its sales efforts. Assume it decides it would like to create an international operation one quarter the size of its current domestic operation. It currently dominates (71 percent market share) the dishwashing soap industry of Norway, a country of roughly 5 million people. That would mean Lilleborg is looking for a market of about:  $5 \text{ million people} * .7 \text{ market share} * .25 \text{ desired new market size} = 875,000 \text{ customers}$

To find a market of about 875,000 likely customers, Lilleborg will want to locate countries with similar social settings to its own in order to enhance the likelihood of similar dishwashing soap needs. Norway has the highest overall Social Progress Index score in the world so it will need to show flexibility determining how similar other countries are. It could expect any country within 5 points in overall score is probably similar enough. The countries within 5 points are:

*Table 7: Countries within 5 Points of Norway on Total Social Progress*

Norway	88
Sweden	88
Switzerland	88
Iceland	88
New Zealand	87
Canada	87
Finland	87
Denmark	87
Netherlands	87
Australia	86
United Kingdom	85
Ireland	85
Austria	84
Germany	84
Japan	83

Lilleborg is looking for a country that could provide about 875,000 customers. Since they are looking to hold about a 25 percent market share that means they would be looking for a country with a population around 3.5 million. Countries on the above list with populations between 2 and 6 million are:

*Table 8: Population of Selected Countries in Millions*

New Zealand	4.5
Finland	5.5
Denmark	5.6
Ireland	4.9

The market size and basic similarity analysis suggests the above 4 countries would be the best

targets for analysis in step two. This analysis requires Lilleborg to consider structural and strategic factors to decide which market best fits their goals and capabilities. Looking into the detailed subscores and raw scores of the Social Progress Index offers many details that will be useful in the analysis of structure. Denmark and Finland are other Nordic countries that will provide cultural consistencies and ease of transition. They are also within the EU so they might provide greater ease of export to other EU countries. Being so close physically and culturally, however, would not expand export potential much. Therefore they might be better served by expanding existing capacity in Norway and expanding export to the countries listed in Table 8.

New Zealand is physically almost as far away from Norway as a country can get. Yet it has many cultural and structural similarities with Norway. If Lilleborg was taking this expansion step as a way to enter new markets for further expansion later, New Zealand would offer a base for moving to Australia and the Pacific that the other European countries would not.

In the end the specific structural concerns of Lilleborg will be paramount in making their decisions. The Social Progress Index has readily available data to help guide them.

## Conclusion

As you can see from the above cases, even though the companies involved face very different goals for going overseas and needs in their overseas markets, each is able to gain a great deal of information from the Social Progress Index for country site selections. These case analyses were performed as models but they show the Social Progress Index provides most, if not all the information needed to perform a first-level country analysis.

The analysis provided here was intentionally simplistic because it is expected that simplicity is desired by most small companies. These analyses can be made much more sophisticated with little effort, however. For example, in these cases all the strategic goals were entered as if they were equally weighted. It would take little effort to double the importance of strategic goal one against goal two, for example, by multiplying the measure used for goal one by two before entering it in your other calculations. Similar techniques would allow you to weight

all your criteria as deemed appropriate to your company's situation.

Although the Social Progress Index is a very useful compilation of data for country analysis, it is not perfect. As seen in our examples, for instance, we needed to get information outside the Social Progress Index for wage estimates. A company could also need information that is specific to them such as transportation costs as seen in the furniture industry case.

The Social Progress Index also has limitations in that it is derived from outside sources of data. That means where those outside sources have gaps in their data, so does the Social Progress Index. The Social Progress Index had complete data for 135 countries in 2015 but had missing data from 27 countries. If one of those missing pieces of data were critical

to your analysis, it would need to be found elsewhere.

Even with the limits of the Social Progress Index, it is a very useful tool for small companies trying to work through which countries are likely to be good manufacturing sites and/or markets. The overall Social Progress Index score is mostly a marketing tool and so of little use but the subscores and compilation of raw data from elsewhere can be valuable aids in analyzing country markets, especially for small companies with limited resources for the analysis. The fact that the spreadsheet, which shows the calculations and data used in the Social Progress Index is readily available and free online, makes it particularly valuable to small companies.

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