



## Returned Entrepreneurs and Ability to Generate Innovations: Case of Kosovo

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<https://doi.org/10.18280/ijstdp.180929>

### ABSTRACT

**Received:** 6 April 2023

**Revised:** 17 August 2023

**Accepted:** 21 August 2023

**Available online:** 26 September 2023

#### **Keywords:**

*experience, innovation, knowledge, returning entrepreneurs*

Numerous scientific studies underscore the importance of returned entrepreneurs for a country's economy. Returned entrepreneurs are individuals who have worked or studied abroad and subsequently returned to their homeland to initiate entrepreneurial ventures, bringing with them experience and knowledge from abroad. The motivations of these returned entrepreneurs vary significantly. This study aims to investigate the motives, knowledge, and experiences of returned entrepreneurs, specifically in the context of Kosovo, and how they contribute to creating innovations. A qualitative data approach is often considered the most appropriate methodology for such investigations, and this study employs it accordingly. To this end, 12 structured interviews were conducted with returned entrepreneurs, which helped us answer the study's objectives. Notably, the motivations of returned entrepreneurs differ across developing countries. The results of this study provide scientific evidence of these differences, thereby contributing to the entrepreneurship literature. The findings highlight that one of the main motivations of entrepreneurs in the Kosovar context relates to knowledge/experiences and connections formed abroad, a finding consistent with human capital theory and Internationalisation Theory. Another significant discovery of this study is that returned entrepreneurs in Kosovo have generated innovations related to new products/services, work methods, production methods, sales methods, and the application of new technologies. The generation of such innovations is regarded as a primary source of a country's economic growth. Therefore, this study is expected to have theoretical implications, as well as political implications beneficial to the local economy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of population emigration presents a significant challenge for many countries, and it continues to intrigue researchers [1]. The rate of people moving across national borders is increasing daily [2]. Beyond general emigration, the departure of educated individuals, also known as the 'brain drain,' poses a worrying challenge for both developed and developing countries [3]. Empirical evidence from various countries indicates an emerging reversal of this trend, with the return of emigrants becoming increasingly common [4, 5]. The return of emigrants who initiate entrepreneurship is of particular interest as this phenomenon holds potential for economic growth and profit maximization within their home countries [6]. These returning entrepreneurs bring back valuable experiences and knowledge gained abroad [7, 8], and they serve as a source of knowledge, investment, and economic development, especially for countries in transition [9].

Kosovo, as a transition country, has dealt with considerable emigration, brain drain, and related challenges. The Kosovar context is particularly interesting because Kosovars are traditionally known as an emigrant population. Studies highlight two stages of emigration in Kosovo: political-economic emigration from 1969 to 1999, and socio-economic emigration from 2001 onwards, with approximately 800,000

people having emigrated during these periods [10]. A mass exodus occurred at the end of 2014 and continued into the first quarter of 2015. Although the rate of emigration has since decreased, it continues to impact the labor force and the country's economy. The departure of skilled individuals is particularly problematic as the absence of their contributions hinders economic progress.

However, research by Krasteva et al. [11] indicates a shift in the trend, with an increasing number of educated young Kosovars returning home and initiating entrepreneurial ventures. Recognizing the importance of these returning entrepreneurs, Kosovo has implemented a reintegration program offering courses and professional training to help these individuals [12].

Numerous studies have explored various aspects of returning entrepreneurs, including determinants of firm performance [13, 14], the impact of the institutional environment [15], the context in Nigeria [16], the second generation of family businesses [17], innovation in Chinese high technology firms [18], performance comparison between returnees and natives in technology ventures [19], social impact [20], and the return of entrepreneurs after conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo [21].

However, a gap in the literature remains regarding returning entrepreneurs and their capacity to generate innovations. It is still unclear whether entrepreneurs returning to developing

countries introduce innovations to their ventures based on the knowledge and experience gained abroad. This paper aims to fill this gap. The structure of the paper is as follows: we will begin with a literature review, followed by the methodology, findings from the collected data, and finally, a conclusion where the findings will be discussed, and a recapitulation of the study will be presented.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review section of this paper will discuss the return of entrepreneurs to the Republic of Kosovo. We will examine the motivations of these returning entrepreneurs within the literature, focusing on their knowledge and, finally, the relationship between their knowledge and experience in generating innovations.

### 2.1 Republic of Kosovo

As this paper is rooted in the Kosovar context, it is essential to provide some background about the country of Kosovo (Figure 1). Kosovo is the youngest country in Europe, having declared independence on February 17, 2008. Kosovo is located in the Western Balkans and is the smallest country in this region, covering a total area of 10,887 square kilometers. According to the World Bank, Kosovo has a population of 1.9 million [22].



**Figure 1.** Geographic information of Kosovo

Sources: <https://www.ezilon.com/maps/europe/kosovo-physical-maps.html>

Despite declaring independence, Kosovo is not universally recognized as a sovereign state and is not a member of the UN. The ongoing dispute with Serbia led to the resumption of negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia in 2011, facilitated by the EU. These negotiations are yet to be concluded [23]. The capital of the Republic of Kosovo is Pristina, which is also its largest city. Pristina, along with the Albanian Alps, Sharri, Anamorava, and the Mitrovica region, is considered the most attractive area for visitors and is a significant draw for tourism [24, 25].

Data on Kosovar entrepreneurship shows that between 2000 and 2021, 213,739 businesses were registered and 30,914 businesses were deregistered. Currently, there are 182,825

active businesses, with micro and small enterprises dominating the landscape, making up 99%, while medium and large businesses make up the remainder [26]. Riinvest [27] conducted a study that emphasized that 85% of businesses in Kosovo are family businesses. These enterprises play a crucial role in mitigating unemployment and are integral to the Kosovar economy. Kosovo's economy is largely service-based and is considered an upper-middle-income country [28].

Migration has played a significant role in the socio-economic development of Kosovo [29]. The lack of political stability, unresolved status issues, failure to improve living standards, and ongoing negotiations led to emigration becoming a viable alternative for the population of Kosovo. According to statistics, in 2012, there were 8,700 cases of irregular emigration recorded, and this statistic rose to 42,272 cases in 2021. The most significant exodus occurred at the end of 2014, with 45,333 cases, and in the first three months of 2015, with 74,434 cases [30].

The Government of the Republic of Kosovo has made efforts to encourage emigrants to return to their homeland. It has relied on institutional theory to design formal policies aimed at encouraging people to return and engage in entrepreneurship [31]. Returned entrepreneurs play a crucial role in the country's economy. Hence, an institutional framework is of utmost importance to create entrepreneurial opportunities for returnees [8, 32]. Recognizing this, the Government of the Republic of Kosovo designed a program to support returnees encouraging them to engage in entrepreneurship. The Department for Integration of Repatriated Persons in the Ministry of Internal Affairs developed this program, offering free business plan training for returnees and a start-up subsidy of 3,000 euros to establish a new enterprise [12]. From 2012 to 2021, there were 81,145 immigrants in Kosovo, while in the same period, 296,515 Kosovar emigrants, predominantly to European Union countries, with Germany being the most popular destination [33].

### 2.2 Returnee entrepreneurs'

Discussing the phenomenon of returning entrepreneurs would be incomplete without acknowledging the foundational contributions in this field [34, 35]. Drori et al. [36] define returning entrepreneurs as individuals who, after gaining experience and knowledge abroad, return to their home country to capitalize on these skills through entrepreneurship. Other researchers [37] regard returning entrepreneurs as those who have worked or studied abroad for at least two years before returning to start a business in their home country. It's important to note that the motives for returning entrepreneurs can vary significantly, depending on their country of origin [38]. Several theories have been proposed to explain the drivers of these entrepreneurs, including Social Capital Theory, Human Capital Theory, Internationalisation Theory, and Institutional Theory [39].

Social Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of networks and connections established by entrepreneurs abroad [40]. The relationships they form, both in their home country and abroad, can significantly influence their motivation to return and start a business [41]. Existing research also indicates that connections made abroad can often be a source of performance and innovation [20, 42]. Capital Theory posits that returning entrepreneurs, armed with the higher knowledge, management skills, and experiences garnered abroad, leverage

these assets when starting a business in their home country [43]. The success of an enterprise often hinges on this human capital, which corresponds to intellectual level differences [44]. Studies suggest that human capital can positively impact the performance of returning entrepreneurs' firms [45, 46].

Internationalisation Theory, as proposed by Qin and Estrin [20], suggests that connections abroad can often enhance company performance. This theory is predicated on the idea that returning entrepreneurs can utilize their international networks to globalize their ventures [47], providing an additional motive for returning to their homeland.

In the context of Institutional Theory, it's crucial not to overlook the institutional context when discussing returning entrepreneurs. This involves facilitating returns through laws and state-supported training programs [32, 37]. However, institutional policies do not always have a positive effect on returning entrepreneurs. In some countries, these policies may fail to adequately support returning entrepreneurs [48], indicating an economic, legal, and political failure to provide suitable regulations and a conducive business climate [49], especially in post-conflict transition countries. According to William and Vorley [50], countries that have experienced conflicts, such as Kosovo and other Western Balkan nations, are in a distinct transition phase compared to other transition countries. Open conflicts do not facilitate good legal studies [51], as previously mentioned with Kosovo's ongoing conflict with Serbia [23]. Despite the repatriation program of the Government of Kosovo [12], returnees still rely on informal ties due to mistrust of formal institutional connections [21].

Based on the literature review, it is clear that the motives of returning entrepreneurs are complex and multifaceted. Thus, the second research question, to be detailed in the methodology section, aims to find out which theory most closely aligns with the motivations of returning entrepreneurs in the Kosovo context.

### 2.3 Knowledge

The second research question aims to shed light on the motives of returning entrepreneurs and identify the theory most closely associated with these motives. Almost all the theories discussed above underscore the importance of human capital. Consequently, the following sections will delve into the knowledge and experience gained abroad by returning entrepreneurs and their ability to spark innovation in their ventures. Liu et al. [38] argue that returning entrepreneurs possess a higher degree of knowledge and demonstrate greater initiative and risk-taking in entrepreneurship compared to their non-returnee counterparts. Returnees often serve as knowledge brokers or transfer agents [52, 53], bringing unique insights from different countries [54] that are not readily available in the home country. This knowledge can be instrumental in enhancing business performance. Having operated in more developed countries, they are familiar with modern business trends [55]. The knowledge acquired abroad often serves as additional motivation to undertake successful, innovative entrepreneurial activities in the home country [3, 13] and fosters positive entrepreneurial decision-making [52]. Returning entrepreneurs can leverage the knowledge gained abroad by connecting with companies in the host countries [37]. This argument aligns with Internationalisation Theory, which stipulates that returning entrepreneurs can use the connections established abroad to internationalize their ventures [47]. Therefore, returning entrepreneurs bring unique skills and knowledge from abroad.

### 2.4 Knowledge and Experience gained to generate innovation

To be successful in the market, new ventures obviously have to be innovative [56-58]. Innovation is a process by which an organization creates a new product or a new service [59]. Innovation topics seem to have been neglected by entrepreneurship researchers [60]. In the Kosovar context, few topics related to the context of innovation in entrepreneurship are evident. Gashi and Ramadani [61] bring scientific evidence for family businesses in Kosovo. It is argued that since Kosovo has an unstable economic environment, family businesses only focus on ensuring survival. Therefore, they are not open to innovation. Then, Toska et al. [62] argue that the second generation in family businesses can generate innovations. We find the same argument in the experience of North Macedonia [63]. Since the second generation is more educated, similar to the returned entrepreneurs, it turns out that the latter could generate innovations. We do not have any study that investigates the ability to generate innovations from entrepreneurs returned to the Kosovar context; therefore, scientific evidence in this field is important. Advanced production methods, new sales methods, new work methods, new products and services, and new technology and processes are some of the innovation forms [64]. Above we discussed that return entrepreneurs have knowledge and experiences which help in performance and ability to generate innovations [3]. We will relate this externally acquired knowledge and experiences to the forms of innovation listed by Dervitsiotis [64]. Return entrepreneurs have a high degree of experience and professional experience gained in different and developed environments [65]. Motives for emigration are related to better working conditions or universities than in their country. Usually, returning entrepreneurs who have lived abroad or studied in different countries bring experiences that improve performance and enable company growth [55]. We find a similar argument among the authors Filatotchev et al. [66], where the capitalization of experience by returning entrepreneurs is closely related to the company's performance. Liu et al. [38] argue that return entrepreneurs are not homogeneous in the context of skills and experiences acquired from abroad. Therefore, we have different elements of knowledge acquired from abroad. Technical skills to apply in high technology are some of the knowledge and experiences that returning entrepreneurs bring from abroad [67]. Here we can conclude that applying technology helps improve work processes, which helps innovation. We also find this argument in the study of Long and Ismail [68], where the authors argue that return entrepreneurs, in the context of knowledge transfer, are inclined to bring technological knowledge as well as technical and managerial skills [69], which help to improve work processes and sales methods. Such an entrepreneurial orientation advances new sales methods, also considered an important form of innovation [70]. Returned entrepreneurs also have a global orientation from the experiences gained in multinational companies. These experiences can be used to advance sales methods, leading entrepreneurship towards export and internationalization [66]. Research and development are also considered another source of innovation, so returning entrepreneurs can have collaborations in the context of R&D in host countries [71]. A connection with these elements can be found in the study of Hajdari et al. [10], which confirms that transferring knowledge from return entrepreneurs positively impacts business development in the

Kosovar context. Also, Ferreira et al. [72] bring scientific evidence from a sample of 98,809 firms from 15 European Union countries where they conclude that knowledge/experience transfer positively impacts open innovation in the context of these 15 European countries. Telov [73] concludes that the knowledge, skills, and experience returnees share with their colleagues impact the benefits of innovation and performance in the Russian context. This is also confirmed in the Chinese context, where it is concluded that explicit and tacit knowledge transfer positively impacts the innovative performance of businesses of Chinese returnees [74]. Therefore, referring to the literature review focusing on the knowledge and experience gained abroad by the returned entrepreneurs in different contexts, we will try to get answers for the Kosovar context, whether the returned entrepreneurs have generated innovations based on the discussed elements upper.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, qualitative data was applied. In order to reach the results, a structured interview was used, which helped to answer the three research questions. This approach of collecting data on topics dealing with the field of entrepreneurship is supported by several researchers [75, 76], who argue that qualitative data enable researchers to have more comparative information. Through the interview, researchers can investigate some of the deeper elements of the respondents such as: motivation, behavior or perception [62, 77]. In this study, the multiple case study approach will be used, which has also been used by researchers in entrepreneurship [39, 62, 63, 78, 79]. So, through the structured interview, we will try to give answers to our research questions. We have a carefully targeted sample of

returning entrepreneurs, who were asked about their motives for returning to their homeland, as well as whether the knowledge and experience gained abroad helped them generate innovations in their ventures. Given that in the register of businesses in Kosovo we do not have specific data for returning entrepreneurs, the "snowball" technique was applied for data collection. Goodman [80], was the first researcher to use this technique and also suggested to use it in similar research natures as in this paper.

#### 3.1 Data collection

The data collected in this study were gathered from entrepreneurs who returned to Kosovo, i.e., from people who stayed for at least two years for work or studies abroad and returned to start entrepreneurship in their homeland. Through the structured interview, we reached the results and answers to the research questions presented in this study. As it is unclear to the scientific community whether returnee entrepreneurs in developing countries have the ability to generate innovations, this study addresses this issue. Therefore, the goal was to get answers from returning entrepreneurs whether they have generated innovations in their ventures, from the knowledge and experiences, gained abroad. As we argued above, the "snowball" data collection technique was used in this paper, since in the Kosovo business register we do not have data on companies from returned entrepreneurs. The longest interview was 60 minutes, while the shortest interview was 25 minutes. The interviews were conducted through written form and direct physical communication. All interviews are recorded. The vast majority of respondents agreed that their business name can be mentioned, with the exception of two respondents, whose company names will be presented with two different names. A total of 12 interviews were conducted, which are presented in the Table 1.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of returned entrepreneurs interviews

Interviewed	Age	Education	Country in Emigration	Years in Migration	Company Name	Number of Employees	Operation	Year of Establishment
Case 1	43	High School	Germany	8	POJATA SHPK	27	Restaurant	2004
Case 2	45	High School	Switzerland	29	ASTORIA LUXURY & SPA	65	Hotel & Restaurants	2018
Case 3	47	High School	Switzerland	31	LED COM CH	34	Retail of IT products	2005
Case 4	35	Master	Iraq	10	BISTRO WAY SHPK	5	Restaurant	2020
Case 5	69	High School	Switzerland	20	BESI	14	Bakery	2011
Case 6	52	Faculty	Switzerland	33	HASI	20	Restaurant	2021
Case 7	38	Faculty	Austria	5	HECTOR SHPK	24	Production of kitchen furniture	2010
Case 8	30	Master	North Macedonia	6	TMT SERVICE	2	Repair / Service	2022
Case 9	32	Master	North Macedonia	6	TOSKA ELECTRONICS	13	Retail and wholesale trade of household appliances	2015
Case 10	39	High School	Switzerland	15	ADRI.F	3	Petrol	2021
Case 11	68	High School	Switzerland	27	SHKODRA PETROL	7	Petrol	2005
Case 12	59	Faculty	Switzerland	17	VALI RANCH	26	Hotel & Restaurants	2006

The age of interviewees was between 30-69 years old. Since all respondents do not know English, the interview was first conducted in Albanian, then translated into English. The results obtained from the case studies helped to answer the research questions of the study. Drawing on the literature discussed in the above points, the research questions are detailed below:

**RQ1:** What were the reasons that encouraged emigration in the Kosovar context?

Why did you decide to leave Kosovo? Who encouraged you to emigrate abroad? What did you do during the time of emigration? What did you work/study?

**RQ2:** What were the motives of entrepreneurs returning to the Kosovar context to work as entrepreneurs?

Have the connections created in emigration been an incentive for entrepreneurship in the homeland? What are they related to? In terms of the motives for returning, did your professional training abroad have an impact? Did the knowledge and experiences gained abroad influence you to start entrepreneurship? Can we also give credit to the institutional context that created a good climate for businesses, as one of your motives for returning to your homeland?

**RQ3:** Were the knowledge and experiences gained abroad a source of innovation for returning entrepreneurs? Can you list us some of the experiences gained abroad? Can you tell us if emigration has influenced the acquisition of new knowledge? What are they? Has the knowledge, and experience gained abroad been a source for you to create innovations in your enterprises?

#### 4. FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

The primary data methodology was the most suitable approach for this study. Also, in the methodology section, we justified this methodological approach, relying on other preliminary studies of a similar nature that have applied this methodology. The applied interview has helped us to answer our research questions and thus arrive at the results of this study.

**RQ1:** What were the reasons that encouraged emigration in the Kosovar context?

The interview was divided into two parts, where the first part focused on obtaining information about the characteristics of the respondents. The second part was focused on getting answers about why the Kosovar emigrants left the country, what urged them to leave the country, what they did during their time in emigration, and whether they studied or worked.

In the case of the POJATA SHPK company, we have this statement:

*“At the time when I emigrated, Kosovo was an insecure country, the cause of political instability. We lost our jobs, we didn't have enough income to live, so I decided to emigrate. The main reasons were economic and security.”*

The owner of the company ASTORIA LUXURY & SPA declares:

*“My family emigrated to Switzerland, understandably for better living conditions, and I joined them.”*

The owner of BISTRO WAY SHPK declares:

*“The economic factor was the main reason why I emigrated*

*abroad. But I must not deny that in addition to the economic reason, another motive was also the gaining of new experiences which I could not get in my homeland.”*

In the case of the company HECOR SHPK, we have this statement:

*“I emigrated abroad for study purposes, personal and professional growth, and development.”*

Another answer can be found in the case of the TMT SERVICE, where the statement is as follows:

*“The reason for leaving Kosovo came because of the desire to study at a more contemporary university, aiming for a higher level of quality.”*

In the case of TOSKA ELECTRONICS, we have this statement:

*“The main reason for leaving Kosovo was the desire to study at a university that offers quality services, contemporary practices, and quality education. I studied Computer Science and have a master's degree in Business Informatics.”*

The owner of the VALI RANCH company says this:

*“The first reason would be that I wanted to further my expertise and secondly to have a better chance for a better future.”*

The owner of the company SHKODRA PETROL expresses:

*“Economic and security reasons pushed me to emigrate abroad.”*

In order to obtain information about the engagement of entrepreneurs in the emigrating countries, we asked questions about what their engagement was abroad, what they worked or studied abroad.

In the case of POJATA SHPK we have this statement:

*“While emigrating abroad, I worked in gastronomy. From the position of waiter, I advanced to the kitchen. The purpose of emigration was not education, but engagement in work to provide sufficient income for the family.”*

In the case of the ASTORIA LUXURY & SPA, we have this statement:

*“I was a carpenter, I worked in different companies such as the brewery, cleaning, and construction. In 1998 I started my own business which is still active.”*

In the case of BISTRO WAY SHPK we have this statement:

*“I was focused on work and professional training. During my time in emigration, I was employed as a material control specialist. I also attended training for logistics, reliability, and data storage for companies.”*

We have this answer for the motives of emigration abroad in the case of the HECTOR SHPK company:

*“The main motive for emigrating was to study abroad in the field of construction, a field which was more advanced for learning in Austria than in Kosovo.”*

In the company TMT SERVICE we have this statement:

*“During my time abroad, I completed my studies from Bachelor to Master, in the field of Computer Science. During*

*the time abroad, I was only involved in studies and professional training.”*

The owner of the VALI RANCH company says this:

*“When I first came to Switzerland, I worked as a dental assistant until I decided to open my own business.”*

Even in the case of other respondents, we have similar answers, enabling us to conclude that the main reasons that encouraged Kosovar entrepreneurs to emigrate abroad were mainly economic and security, given the fact that in the countries of the Western Balkans, there was no political and economic stability, especially in the late 90s of the 20th century. However, the difficult economic situation continued in the post-war transition, even at the beginning of the new 21st century. The respondents' responses are consistent with the two phases of the emigration of Kosovars, as we concluded in the introduction of this article. The first phase is political-economic emigration from 1969 to 1999, then socio-economic emigration from 2001 onwards [10]. Recently, we have had more and more younger generations who also emigrate for professional training, studying in the most prestigious universities to get the necessary knowledge and experience to be prepared for the labor market and the challenges of entrepreneurship. So, engagements in emigration are for work and studies. Further studies will likely argue for a new phase.

**RQ2:** What were the motives of entrepreneurs returning to the Kosovar context to work as entrepreneurs?

The second research question aimed to obtain information about the entrepreneurs' motives for engaging in entrepreneurship. Did the connections abroad have an impact, or was the professional training abroad more influential to return? The knowledge and experience gained abroad can be an additional motivation to engage in entrepreneurship?

In the case of the POJATA SHPK, we have this statement:

*“I wanted to create capital while working abroad, so that one day I could come and invest in Kosovo, thanks to the experiences and knowledge gained abroad. The experience gained abroad was an additional incentive for me to invest in Kosovo, since I came from a more developed country than Kosovo, where you can get many ideas for contemporary business models.”*

The owner of the company ASTORIA LUXURY & SPA declares:

*“I always wanted to return to Kosovo. I had connections with partners in Kosovo who have the skills to deal with entrepreneurship. I used the connections I made to finance a new business in my country. Also, I can then emphasize the fact that the experience and knowledge gained abroad were additional reasons to invest in Kosovo and the fact that we now have a successful business.”*

In the case of the LED COM CH we have this statement:

*“After independence, Kosovo has installed a favorable tax legislation for businesses. Taxes are low, the business climate is good. I also have a company in Switzerland, where I enjoy connections with partners outside Kosovo who pushed me to deal with entrepreneurship in Kosovo as well, since I can bring new products and services, using these connections.”*

In the case of BISTRO WAY SHPK we have this statement:

*“The experiences gained in cultural diversity abroad were the motivation to return to Kosovo and start entrepreneurship.”*

The owner of the BESI company answers:

*“I was an emigrant in Switzerland a very developed country. The most advanced methods of doing business were applied there. Such an experience gained was a push to return to my hometown to invest in order to use this experience gained abroad.”*

Referring to the case of the HASI company, we have this answer:

*“In Kosovo, there are no barriers to starting and doing business. This can be considered the first reason. Then, I have a democratic business management approach by consulting with the employees for business decision-making. An additional motive was to capitalize on this approach in my hometown.”*

Another answer can be found in the case of TMT SERVICE, where the statement is as follows:

*“One of the main reasons that impacted my decision to open a business in Kosovo was the lack of qualitative services and serious businesses in the Market. At the same time, the opportunity to create a business that would be more competitive in such a market, using the experience gained abroad.”*

In the case of the company TOSKA ELECTRONICS we find this statement:

*“One of the main motives to return to Kosovo and to work with the business was the desire to offer Kosovar consumers new and innovative brands and products and to offer a better alternative by using the experience created abroad. Professional education had a great impact on the decision to work in business.”*

Referring to the answers received from the case studies, we can also answer the second research question, concluding that in the Kosovar context, the motives of entrepreneurs to return and engage in entrepreneurship are mainly based on knowledge and experience acquired abroad, which relates to Human Capital Theory [43, 46]. Likewise, other motives are the use of ties created abroad, which is related to Internationalisation Theory [20, 47].

**RQ3:** Were the knowledge and experiences gained abroad a source of innovation for returning entrepreneurs? The third research question aimed to obtain information about the experiences gained abroad, the knowledge gained abroad, since emigration goes in the direction from underdeveloped countries to developed ones. Then, did this acquired knowledge help generate innovations in their enterprises?

The owner of the company POJATA SHPK declares:

*“Since I work in gastronomy, as innovation I can describe new recipes that are not found in competitors. I brought a mushroom sauce, thanks to the experience gained in Germany, where for local consumers it was something interesting. I also installed a business program which helps in the realization of orders and their management.”*

In the case of the ASTORIA LUXURY & SPA company, we received this answer:

*"I have introduced special fish and sushi menus, which you will not find in other restaurants in the area where we operate. I brought some other special menus during my experience in Spain. Also, I have improved the customer service system, coordinating the communications of the online tools that make it easier for customers to make reservations. The online platform on the website, social media sponsorship, and the integration of booking.com with the hotel reservation system were welcome innovations for our customers."*

In the case of the LED COM CH we have this statement:

*"I gained a lot of experience in management and entrepreneurship during my time in Switzerland. Advanced business models, the installation of systems that improve work and sales processes are some of the experiences and knowledge gained abroad. In Kosovo, I have brought innovation in the context of online shopping. The creation of the virtual store and the promotion or favoring of online sales, also provide training for the staff to strengthen themselves in this aspect. We have had a lot of success with this form of sales."*

In the case of BISTRO WAY SHPK we have this answer:

*"Learning leadership was one of the special experiences I would highlight during my time in emigration. In Kosovo, I brought some innovations in special food menus that were not there before, such as Mexican food menus. I also work with social media, which helps us in sales performance and customer communication."*

In the case of HECTOR SHPK we have this statement:

*"Entrepreneurial mindset and management methods were some of the experiences gained abroad, which were missing in our country. In the context of innovation, I would highlight the integration of application programs for designing kitchens, which facilitates the production process. Likewise, online sales can be another form of innovation that I have brought, designing the company's online presence."*

The founder of the TMT SERVICE shares a special experience in the context of knowledge and innovation:

*"Considering that during my studies all information and systems were online and considering the faculty I studied at, I benefited a lot by understanding how systems are used, how they are created, how users are trained, how information is managed and used, also knowing a lot different technological platforms that our business currently uses. During 6 years abroad, I had the opportunity to see how businesses operate abroad thanks to the visits we made to them in the university framework, so I could see the differences and similarities between the two countries. Knowledge and experience abroad were great sources of inspiration for innovation. The use of online platforms, the creation of a relevant database for more successful stock management, as well as online sales were all experiences and knowledge gained abroad."*

In the case of the TOSKA ELECTRONICS we have this statement:

*"I gained knowledge in creating and using databases and different ERP systems. The different practices that the professors who had studied and worked in different countries told us. Creation of online presence, e-commerce sites, SEO, and much more. Something I created when I started the business. I started with the application of new technologies,*

*creating databases for stock and sales management and sales in social networks."*

ADRI. F was also another respondent in this investigation. He answers as follows:

*"During my time in emigration, I attended various trainings for business startups. I have had meetings with various entrepreneurs and lecturers in the field of entrepreneurship who have influenced me to have an entrepreneurial mindset. In my business in Kosovo, in the village where I operate, I brought an automated car wash which was a novelty and related to my gas station operation."*

We also find an interesting answer in the case of the VALI RANCH, the owner is explained as follows:

*"Most of the knowledge I have accumulated over the years has come from being an emigrant who has built a modest and successful business outside of Kosovo. I have changed the way some Kosovars spend their free time with new activities and in a relaxing way. Our resort brings special services to the attraction, which make our company one of the five most sought-after destinations in Kosovo."*

Likewise, other statements are similar to the interviewed respondents. The answers obtained help us to answer the third research question that returned entrepreneurs had the ability to generate innovations in their enterprises. From the answers received, we can conclude that entrepreneurs returning to the Kosovar context brought innovations thanks to the knowledge and experience gained abroad. We find the same statement among the authors [3, 13]. Also, the findings are consistent with the Russian context [73], the Chinese context [74] and Ferreira et al. [72] in the experience of EU countries. The innovations were mainly: new products/services, new work methods, new production methods, and new sales methods, applying online sales and virtual stores, as well as the application of new technologies thanks to the experience gained abroad [64]. We can also conclude that creating innovations can have political implications due to the fact that innovation can be considered a source of economic growth for countries, which is a challenge for many economies and governments [81].

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to investigate whether the entrepreneurs returned to the Kosovar context, their knowledge, and experiences gained from abroad helped in the generation of innovations. The introduction argued that empirical evidence from a country in transition, such as Kosovo, is necessary for the scientific community. The study began with a brief explanation of the Kosovar context and entrepreneurship. Then we elaborated on the returning entrepreneurs' motives and what prompted them to return to their homeland. In this section, these motives were related to the theories of returning entrepreneurs to see which theory is more similar to the motives of Kosovar entrepreneurs to return to their homeland. The results from the interviews show that the most dominant motives that encourage entrepreneurs to return to their homeland in the Kosovar context are mainly supported by the knowledge and experience gained abroad, as well as the ties created abroad, and these motives are closer to Human Capital Theory and Internationalisation Theory being consistent with

studies [20, 42, 43, 45-47]. It should also be argued that our findings are consistent with the research of William [21], where he argues that in the countries of the Western Balkans, especially the post-conflict countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Kosovo, informal ties remain the driving force of returned entrepreneurs, not trusting formal institutional ties.

Then the study was deepened to the experiences and acquired knowledge of Kosovar entrepreneurs who returned from abroad. What were those knowledge and experiences, and did these knowledge and experiences affect their ability to generate innovations? The results show that entrepreneurs returning to the Kosovar context left the country for security reasons and political and economic circumstances, but also for study purposes, investing in their professional training. We find that the returned entrepreneurs could generate innovations from the answers received. New products and services, new work and production methods applying contemporary technologies, and new sales methods applying online sales and virtual stores were some of the innovations brought by entrepreneurs returning to the Kosovar context. The results find consistency with previous studies [3, 13, 64]. Also, the findings are consistent with the context of Russian [73], Chinese [74], and Ferreira et al. [72] in the experience of EU countries. The findings are also consistent with some family entrepreneurship studies in Kosovo's empirical experience [62] and North Macedonia [63].

The main findings of this study can be emphasized that one of the motivations of entrepreneurs to return to the Kosovar context was: experience/knowledge and ties created abroad. We can also emphasize that another main finding is the fact that the entrepreneurs who returned to the Kosovar context had the ability to generate innovations. We can conclude by discussing the obtained results that this paper will bring theoretical and political implications.

As *theoretical implications*, we will emphasize that for the literature on returned entrepreneurs, it is in the interest to have scientific evidence from developing countries such as the case of Kosovo. Did the returned entrepreneurs bring innovation to their ventures from the knowledge and experience gained abroad? Also, from the literature review, we see that it is still unclear whether the returned entrepreneurs can generate innovations in their enterprises. Therefore, we conclude that the paper will have theoretical implications, further enriching the literature on returning entrepreneurs.

*Political implications* also are evident in this study, bringing a scientific experience from a developing country such as Kosovo to returned entrepreneurs. Today, the country's economic growth is challenging for many states and governments. Studies emphasize the importance of innovation in economic growth. For example, Toska and Fetaj [81] conclude that innovation can generate economic growth for countries. Then, Pece et al. [82] argues that innovation is important for the country's economy in general. The increase in employment is also a challenge for governments and different economies; therefore, returned entrepreneurs who can generate innovation influence the reduction of unemployment and are considered vital potential for the country's economy [6]. Therefore, this study can serve policymakers to create an appropriate economic climate in the country and design adequate programs that promote the return of entrepreneurs to provide these benefits to the country's economy.

**Limitations:** As a limitation, the fact that this study deals

with the Kosovar context can be emphasized; that is, the data were collected in the territory of Kosovo. The study used a qualitative approach to data collection, using multiple case studies with 12 case studies in our case. Researchers working with quantitative data may generate different results. Therefore, it must be accepted that it may generate different results in studies with quantitative data where the number of respondents is greater. The study is not specified in specific industries. Various industries are included, with a focus on returned entrepreneurs. Highlighting those limitations below, we are giving suggestions for further studies.

**Further research:** Important for other studies is to bring the empirical experiences of other developing countries to enrich the literature of returned entrepreneurs in the context of the abilities to generate innovations in their ventures in their countries of origin. The same problem can be investigated with the quantitative approach. As the study was not focused on specific industries, other studies may address a similar topic in specific industries of entrepreneurs. Since developing countries do not have a good infrastructure, other studies can focus on the analysis of the external environment in the context of the performance of returnee entrepreneurs' companies. For future studies, it can also be specified in younger age groups of return entrepreneurs, as our study had no limitations and comparisons for different age groups of return entrepreneurs.

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